

LS, Park

Spring 2001

Minnesota English Journal

Student Writing Issue



Text, Subtext, & Context

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Wonders of Writing
by Chelsey Mundt, grade 11
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Preface

"Writing only leads to more writing." - Collette

In discussions about the future direction of *The Minnesota English Journal* a year and a half ago, the MCTE Board considered options that would make MEJ more useful to members and would also make the job of editor, a volunteer position, more reasonable. The Board decided to split the two yearly issues and place them under the direction of separate editors, each assisted by an editorial board. The Board decided that the fall issue would continue its focus on scholarly and pedagogical articles, while the spring issue would be a publication of student writing along the lines of a literary magazine. Under the direction of Jake Oetting, the editor of the fall journal, the focus of that publication has sharpened, with an even wider range of article topics and authorship. In our search to define the focus of the new approach in the spring journal, we, its editorial board, decided to make this a team effort, working together for the last eight months to bring you this journal.

But the star players on our team are the student writers. The submitted texts inspired the direction of this journal. In the spirit of writing workshop, we wanted to know more about the writers: How did Joshua Helmin come to write his personal narrative? What was Danielle Hagen's intention in her ending to *Moonlight*? How did Thao Vuong's poem connect with her life in Vietnam? We asked them, and were impressed by the enthusiasm and insight in their responses. Adding their subtexts gave an additional richness to the excellence of their writing.

Throughout our meetings, our overarching question was the question we all face in our classrooms: How can we help all students be more accomplished writers? So we asked teachers to share some of their understandings and techniques, the context, and were again rewarded with generosity and insight. We are grateful for the speed with which teachers responded to requests for short articles and for the graciousness of the professional writers in granting permission for reprinting their work. We are also grateful for help and material from other sources: slides of artwork from the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, photographs from Bob Zimmerman's students at Champlin Park, poems from Linda Rief, and technical assistance from The John Roberts Company, from Sentinel Printing, and from Susan Meyer of Becker High School.

The purpose of this issue of *Minnesota English Journal* was to give teachers useful models of writing to use in their classrooms. We are awed by how our purpose evolved spontaneously into so much more. We hope that the writing in this journal leads to writing from your students that you'd like to submit for the next issue [see page 79]. Maybe it will be responses to the invitations found in the last section, or maybe it will be excellent writing from class assignments, or maybe even creative pieces of your students' own devising.

That's the most wonderful part of this project: We can't wait to see what your students will come up with next!

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Best Friends for Life

Mike Ethier

Armstrong High School, grade 11

"Where's that kid?" The tough little hooligan on his Big Wheel wanted to play with me. Thus, at age four, our unlikely friendship began. My mom thinks our friendship is very unusual, as in many ways Andrew and I are very different people. Andrew has a severe case of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). At a young age he was the terror of the neighborhood and the outcast at school. Yet we became good friends, and now I don't know what I would do without him.

Andrew had had a hard life, starting when he was a baby born to a teenage couple, at least one of whom abused drugs. This may have contributed to his ADHD and learning disabilities. He was given up for adoption before the age of one. He was wild even then, causing great concern for his adopted parents. When he was two, they got a divorce, possibly because of the stress he put on their marriage. He has lived with his mom ever since, but fortunately he keeps in fairly close contact with his dad.

When he was young, his mom bore the brunt of his behavioral problems, and essentially couldn't control him. Consequently, he would roam up and down the neighborhood on his Big Wheel at will. When I first got to know him at age four, I was fascinated but somewhat afraid of him. He was big, wild, and strong for a four-year-old, but what mattered to me was that we had fun together. We both enjoyed playing in the sandbox and riding our Big Wheels, so we became friends.

Although I do not remember many specifics of our friendship at that young age, my mom tells me it presented problems. While I liked Andrew and he liked me, he was out of control. He had no respect for authority. If my mom asked him to do something, he would just flat out ignore her, or get very mad. In first grade he tried to back his mom's car out of the driveway, much to the alarm of the neighborhood adults, and he had the habit of breaking windows in all the houses in the neighborhood by haphazardly throwing rocks or hitting golf balls. On occasion he would wander into someone's garage, and if he saw something that caught his eye, he would take it home to play with it. My mom even called a child psychologist to ask if our friendship was a bad idea. In spite of these problems, I always liked Andrew, and I didn't even care about his wild side, or realize he was ostracized at school as a "retard" and a "loser."

On the surface, Andrew and I seemed totally different. I was the bright young kid, reading voraciously as soon as I could, and being especially interested in topics such as history. I would browse the encyclopedia as a young child, fascinated with what I read. Even now school comes very easy to me, and I have high ambitions for the future. Andrew was the total opposite. He struggled with school and reads at a second grade level to this day. He had no respect for authority, and was very physical at a young age, always kicking, throwing, shoving, and hitting (usually objects and not people). I'm sure his mother spent many sleepless nights worrying about him.

What started off as playing in the sandbox quickly grew to bigger things as we got older. We shared many common interests, and we spent many happy hours riding our bikes off jumps in the street, building and launching model rockets, and building a clubhouse in his garage. Andrew was unable to participate in sports like I was, because he couldn't grasp the team concept. I still remember his one attempt at soccer in first grade. A kid on the other team was making a dash toward the goal, and Andrew, who was twice the size and strength of anyone else, simply knocked the kid flat on his back rather than go for the ball. That's the kind of kid he was. But when we were together, we got along great. Throughout the years, we spent huge amounts of time together, so much that my mom would have to get after me to see my other friends. Today we still do many things together, such as skiing in Colorado, swimming at our cabins, playing Nintendo at his house, or running a lawn mowing service in our neighborhood during the summer.

We have been through hard times. Andrew and I never went to the same school, since I attended a Catholic grade school, and then enrolled in the public schools, while Andrew was removed from the public schools and placed in a private school for children with learning disabilities. I feel bad now, but when I was younger I would sometimes take advantage of the monopoly I had on his friendship. When a school friend of mine wanted to get together, I would, even if it meant brushing off Andrew. I knew he had no other friends, so he would still be there when I got back. This was incredibly selfish and downright mean of me, and I feel absolutely terrible for thinking that way.

A particularly traumatic event in our friendship occurred two summers ago, when we were fifteen. Andrew has an adjustable, movable basketball hoop, and we had been shooting baskets all day. We had the hoop at its highest setting, and we had to tip it over to lower it, since it got stuck. I tipped it over and Andrew tried to adjust it, when suddenly the backboard crashed down, crushing Andrew's fingers in the adjusting mechanism.

In the same instant, it slipped out of my hands so Andrew was lifted in the air by his crushed fingers. When he got his fingers loose, they were a bloody, mangled mess, and he had to be rushed to the hospital. After emergency surgery in the middle of the night, he was put on strong painkillers, and spent much of the summer with his arm immobilized. I felt horrible as I had ruined the summer for him, but what really frightened me was that I may have hurt his ability to make a living because I knew he needed his hands to be the mechanic he hoped to become. Fortunately, he had one finger reattached and just lost the tip of the other, and he made it very clear to me that it was an accident that could happen to anyone so I shouldn't feel bad.

Andrew has the vulnerability and heart of a little kid. Up until very recently he always would call our house as soon as he got home from school, announcing to my mom, "Hi, Linda, I'm home now." His mom didn't make him do this, he just wanted us to know he was there. Andrew acts like a little kid around our feisty terrier Wally. The dog really likes Andrew (it must be something about the way he smells) but Andrew is afraid to pet him, despite how much he would like to. He reaches down to touch Wally, but keeps getting scared and draws back. It is also not unusual for me to head over to his house in the summer, only to discover him in his backyard hurling rocks across the lengths of two neighboring yards into a small pond. We have gone camping in the Boundary Waters with a YMCA camp on a number of occasions, and Andrew, in addition to gaining a reputation as the strongest kid in the group, is always the one who starts throwing rocks as soon as he gets into a campsite.

Andrew also has retained the physical invincibility of a small child. I clearly remember him up in the Boundary Waters, tripping over a canoe on the ground, toppling backwards into it, and smashing his head on the side. While this fall would have knocked most people out cold, Andrew just groaned a little and got up. He has the resilient heart of a kid to this day.

Our friendship has been very special, and we have helped each other in many ways. Andrew is very suggestible, and could easily end up with the wrong crowd. I have done my best to guide him over the years, which hasn't been too hard as he imitates everything I do. I received my first pair of glasses in first grade, and Andrew insisted on getting some too, even though he didn't need them. He made it a point to get the exact same style I had. Hopefully the influence I have had on Andrew will make him a better person. I *know* I will be a better person because of our friendship. When I see kids getting teased or just looked down upon because they have a learning disability, I think of how that could be Andrew, and how there probably have been occasions when that *was* Andrew. I have seen what those kids have to offer, through knowing

Andrew, and it's just as much, if not more than what the rest of us have to offer. Just watching him work hard to overcome his challenges inspires me to try harder. And knowing him gives me an open-mindedness toward all people.

Andrew and I have been friends for a long time, and probably will remain so our entire lives. Even though we are both growing up, as we now have girlfriends and are looking to a future where we may go different ways, we will always be best friends. We are like brothers, only we have more fun together. We are best friends for life.

Alwayz Cool

Me and my best friend
We have our own style
Alwayz have, alwayz will
If u know us, u'll never 4get.
Our crazy personalitez
The ditz mentality
Our valleygirl accentz
Will amaze u and
If u don't agree
With our lifestyle
Ur not worth our time
But if u do u'll truly
Know what fun iz
Cuz we're da cooles MSMz
So learn the rulz
Live our gamz
And Luv US...
Ana and Magz
Best friendz 4eva
DUH!!!!!!!!!!!!

Ana Pitigoi
Kennedy High School, grade 10

Mike's Reflection:

I wrote this paper specifically for this writing award. The essay was never an assignment, and my teacher never saw it. It is not necessarily something I would have wanted passed around the class or shared in a small group anyway, as that is what frequently happens with classroom assignments. Fortunately, it was extremely easy to write, as it was a subject very near and dear to me.

While it is an uncomfortable subject and not one I would share with many people, writing the paper was simple. And it will definitely be a paper I can look back on for the rest of my life, and have the memories come flooding back.

Coming Home to Myself

Joshua Helmin

Hopkins High School, grade 11

"I've never said it aloud," I confessed.

"I know," she said, her bottom lip quivering. "I know."

I was surprised when tears came into my own eyes. It seemed a heavy, constricting weight had formed in the back of my throat, inhibiting my ability to speak.

"Josh, I've been your girlfriend for almost five years now. I know you really, *really* well." She paused briefly, and I could tell from the look on her face that she was choosing her words carefully. "Josh, I won't love you any less. It'll be different, but I'll always be here."

A tear slipped down my cheek. I took a deep breath and made direct eye contact with her.

"I'm gay," I said flatly.

The words stunned me. I felt a mixture of shock, horror, and elation all at once. I felt liberated and empowered and yet terrified. I had never spoken those words in my entire life.

I tried it again.

"I'm gay," I said a little louder. I paused and refocused my mind. "Yeah, I'm gay," I said with a dash of confidence.

She smiled at me with tears running down her face. When she hugged me, she clung to me as if it was the last time she was ever going to see me. "There you go," she whispered. "I knew you could do it." At last I had confided my awakening feelings to her, and sadly my confession ended our five year relationship indefinitely.

I silently thanked God. I wasn't exactly sure what I was thankful for, but I thanked God wholeheartedly anyway. At the age of fifteen, the longest, hardest, and most fulfilling journey of my life began.

A few days later I found myself walking through the cold metal turnstiles of the public library. I had told my mother that I was working on an honors biology project and had even brought my textbook into the library as a prop. I felt like a secret agent, slyly avoiding the enemy and making everyone think I was an unsuspecting passerby, instead of a man with a mission.

Personal Narrative

With furtive glances in all directions I stepped up to one of the computer terminals. I placed the biology textbook next to me so anybody coming remotely near me would think perhaps I was working on a science fair project or a mid-term paper. I was careful to place my body directly in front of the screen before I typed in the word "gay," and pressed the return key. The computer began whirring, and suddenly dozens of titles were spinning before my eyes. I feverishly wrote down the numbers plastered on the screen and scuttled off into the shelves of books.

I felt I was going on a treasure hunt that would let me know who I was. I worked my way around much of the library, gathering at least a dozen books. I clutched the books in my arms, holding them so the titles were covered. I made my way to a private corner of the library where I devoured all of the sacred information. I read about the hundreds of people throughout history like Michelangelo, Alexander the Great, and Walt Whitman who were gay and had positively impacted the world. I read about intelligent activists who showed me how ridiculous and frivolous homophobia was. I read gay people need to first overcome all their fears and prejudices about gay people - something the authors called internalized homophobia - so gay people can learn to accept themselves. I also read that gay people need to know themselves thoroughly and be centered so they can deal with all the opposition they may face in life. With my voracious hunger for knowledge not yet satisfied, I consumed a book of essays by gay teens. They told stories of how their parents reacted to finding out their children were gay and how their friends and schoolmates reacted. Of equal interest to me were stories about the trials and tribulations of young, forbidden love as told by the young gay authors.

My head was spinning. It was becoming quite clear to me that nothing was wrong with being gay. For me, being gay was the most natural thing in the world. It felt right. I had always believed love was beautiful no matter what form it took. I was sure that God sanctified all love.

I felt more and more comfortable as I said the words "I'm gay." I practiced them in front of the mirror in my bedroom. I wrote about being gay in my journal and read about being gay in books. I felt validated and confirmed as a human being. I had a deep sense within myself that I was on my way to becoming a *whole* person.

I started doing wonderful things for myself. I started running three miles every other day, lifting weights, and kick-boxing. I concentrated on healthy eating, good sleep patterns, and making academics the shining star of my life. I felt invincible. Sheer happiness and euphoria spilled over into my daily life. People began asking what had changed and I would hesitate and say, "Well, nothing big."

I had become completely truthful and honest with myself but still hadn't told anyone I was gay. During one particularly grueling kick-boxing routine I began thinking about telling people I was gay. I rushed home after the class was finished with a sense of urgency.

I began examining my own fears. I opened a notebook and started writing. I wrote, "To come out or not to come out. That is the question... I've been chewing and debating on this for a long time. Now things are intensifying. For example, Aurélian is trying to set me up with so many different girls and he can't understand why I'm not interested in them. I don't like it here in the closet, but it seems much safer here... Well, I've got to get out of the safety zone. Deep down I am scared of violence and continued harassment. Those aren't paranoid, absurd fears. I'm afraid of being called "faggot" in the halls, of having my teachers and classmates treat me differently. I am afraid of not having a response for all the haters. I can't imagine sitting in an English or science class and having all the people know I'm gay. But, it has to happen sometime I guess. Maybe I should wait for junior year... But what if I get to junior year and then say I'll wait for senior year? Then what? I can't be pure me unless I'm truthful about who I am. I pledge to myself that I will come out soon. Maybe not tomorrow, but soon."

With that manifesto written, I challenged myself further and slowly started to gently nudge myself out of the closet. I started to family and friends the truth, but each time I started to really say what I meant, a knot seemed to tighten in my stomach. But it didn't take me much longer before I started to tell people the truth.

I picked up the phone. I hung it up again. I picked it up, dialed five digits, and then hung it up again. I sighed. Briefly I wondered if I was insane. Didn't gay people get rejected by their friends and family? Didn't they get spit on and pushed in the halls and get called "queer bastards?" I told my fears to shut up and again picked up the receiver.

I called my best friend Ariel first.

"You're gay?" she asked, sounding giddy. "You know, I wondered about that. So who do you think is cute in our school?"

Her reaction shocked me. She came from a respectable, wealthy Jewish family. For some reason I thought her wealth and religion would have an effect on her response to gay people. I always assumed maybe she would be judgmental or cold about the whole gay topic. The truth was she didn't think it was a big deal at all.

When Ariel and I finished talking, I decided to call another close friend.

"You're gay?" Alisha asked incredulously. Then she laughed and sounded relieved. "Josh, I've been in love with you for *two years* and I've always wondered why you never responded to my flirtations or the trail of hints I left you. I thought maybe I wasn't cute enough or maybe... I don't know." She laughed again. "I feel a lot better now." Suddenly her voice became quiet and she seemed very concerned. "Josh, are you okay with this? I mean, you're not depressed or anything, are you?" I laughed and assured her that I was definitely fine.

I worked through my entire speed dial list of twenty people that Sunday afternoon. Nobody hung up on me, nobody called me names, and nobody rejected me. Instead I was met with people who were thankful I trusted them and cared enough about them to be truthful and honest. Many of them had a slew of questions which they asked and I answered to the best of my ability.

When I opened the door to my house, I could hear the phone ringing. I tossed down my backpack, peeled off my shoes, and frantically ran for the phone.

"Hello?" I said, trying to sound calm and composed.

"Hi, Joshua, it's Grandpa."

"Oh, hi, Grandpa!"

"I got your message and called you back right away. Sounded like you wanted to talk."

For a moment I balked.

"Well, I wanted to tell you something."

"I've got all the time in the world," he said patiently. It might take that long, I thought to myself.

"Well... do you remember Evelyn, my girlfriend?"

"Is she the blond that makes the good angel food cake?"

"Yeah, yeah that's her," I said quickly. "And uhm, we broke up not too long ago."

"Why?" Grandpa inquired compassionately.

"Well, grandpa... I, uhm... like boys." Then I bravely added, "I mean, I like boys and not girls." There was a deafening silence from the other end.

"You mean you're gay?" Grandpa asked gently. I didn't even know he knew what the word "gay" meant.

"Yeah. I am."

He sighed. "Well, I don't know if being gay is a sin, but why don't you ask Jesus' forgiveness just in case. God forgives all sins, you know. Jesus always loved the down-trodden. He always was with the lepers and poor and tried to give them hope."

My heart was soaring. My grandfather, one of the most devout Roman Catholics walking the face of the earth, had just said it was okay I was gay. He had accepted me. I thought the hardest battle had just been forged.

I was very, very wrong about that.

I told my parents during dinner. My mother stopped eating and looked like she had choked on her mashed potatoes. My father just looked confused.

"Josh, there are many teenagers who get confused and explore things."

"I know, Mom, but this isn't just a phase that can be dismissed. I've been dealing with this for over a year now. They're pretty strong feelings, too."

Mom looked like she was going to lose her dinner. She looked pale and depressed. I felt a surge of guilt as I saw the pained, sad expression on her face. "Well, I wonder what happened," she said pensively. She listed off events and things and people she thought could have "made me" gay.

"Mom, being gay isn't *caused* by something. It's something innate. Nobody can make a straight person gay and nobody can make a gay person straight. People are who they are." I went on to educate my parents with all the information I'd gathered over the past months.

"Josh, you're too young to know you're gay," my mother said frantically.

"Really? Okay, take my friend Kenny for example. He's been with his girlfriend Melissa for almost a year. Is he too young to know that he's straight?" My mother had

Personal Narrative

nothing to say to that and instead changed the subject.

"There's nurture and there's nature," my mother stated. "Josh, I don't believe you're gay. You were with Evelyn for – what, five years? – and I know you *loved* her. Josh, you don't have to be gay."

"Mom. . . Dad. . . Don't you understand what I'm saying? It takes some serious guts to sit here and bare my soul to you. I don't want to lie, I don't want to pretend. I want you to know who I am." I started rambling. "If I'm gay or straight or if I want to be an architect or an actor or if I want to live in Africa or Arkansas, I'll still love you and you'll still love me. Isn't that the way it works?"

"Joshua, I'll always love you. I just don't want to deal with this." She got up from the table and cleaned her plate. The plate clattered noisily in the sink as she left the room.

My parents weren't behind me. They didn't understand that I could never be happy and contented with a girl. They later went on to make it quite clear I wouldn't be allowed to date or have gay friends while I lived under their roof. My parents and I had always been very close, and I felt very hurt by their adverse reaction. When my mom and I went on car trips, we would blast the radio and sing at the top of our lungs. My mom and I would sit on the couch and have elaborate discussions about college and my future for hours on end. My dad and I would sit and watch the Vikings games and talk about things that were bothering me during the commercials.

I responded to their negative reaction by moping around the house and school. I was angry, sad, and bitter. After a week of that unstable, disgusting emotional mix, I decided to put their reaction behind me as much as possible. I would always love my parents and they would always love me, but perhaps some issues existed which we could not work through. My strength was momentarily shaken, but I moved on to more important things.

My newly discovered inner strength and confidence kept my life moving. I continued to visit the library under the guise of needing to do research or study. From reading books I learned how to deal with homophobic people and learned how to function as a gay person in a straight world. Through all of this new education and self-care I had found contentment within myself.

At the end of my sophomore year I decided to take all of my courage and "out" myself to my school. I told my

favorite teachers I was gay. All of them responded positively and many said they would be available to talk with me, day or night, if I needed to talk with someone.

One of my teachers even suggested I join PROUD, the school's Gay/Straight Alliance. I joined and soon became one of the most active members. During one meeting we decided we should have speakers go around to different classes to talk about being gay. I volunteered to be a speaker. The thought of being a speaker on gay issues to my peers struck fear into my heart, yet a reciprocal burning desire to charge at the opportunity took precedence.

Kristin and I made our first presentation at our high school when only ten days were left in the school year. It was warm and sticky outside and a feeling of restlessness hung thick in the air. Sunlight shone through the windows; clumps of students sat near the windows, soaking in the sun like little green plants. My attention wasn't focused on the weather, however. I was about to make my first presentation to a classroom full of peers. Before walking into the classroom, I almost threw up. I put my head between my legs and told Kristin I didn't think I could do the presentation.

"Don't do this for anybody but you," Kristin said fearlessly. "Later you can worry about the other people. Talking about being gay is only going to make this easier for both of us in our own lives. And maybe you can even take the fear factor out of the word "gay" by showing them we're just like them. Maybe you can help stomp out homophobia and help stop hate and ignorance." She paused before she delivered the clincher. "But you're never going to do that unless you take my hand and walk through that door right now. You have less than three minutes to decide before we're supposed to speak."

My heart told me to get up. I knew I wanted to do this presentation. I shifted my mindset from fear to confidence. I called to mind everything I knew about myself and about being gay. As we walked through the door of the classroom, I smelled the familiar antiseptic smell of our health and science department. From neat little rows of desks thirty pairs of eyes peered at me silently with hints of curiosity and skepticism.

"My name is Josh and this is Kristin," I said calmly and crisply. "We're from PROUD, the school's Gay/Straight Alliance and we're here to talk to you about being gay and particularly about being gay in high school." After that point

I was on a roll. Kristin and I told them our personal stories and then moved to a group discussion format, allowing the students to ask any questions they had for us.

By the end of the day I felt like I had helped make the world a better place. I hadn't cured cancer, I hadn't won the Presidential nomination, I hadn't figured out how to feed starving children in Somalia. I had, however, told 92 peers about my life and helped dispel fears and stereotypes of gay people.

I felt I could have strapped on running shoes that very moment and run a marathon in two hours flat. I felt I had found a purpose in life. I had done a very, very good thing.

Two years have passed since I sat on that rickety old dock, confessing to my long-time girlfriend I was gay. I have conquered my fears and become educated on the topic of gay rights and discrimination. I take care of myself emotionally, physically, and spiritually. As a result of my new experiences, I've become comfortable within my own skin.

I've told aunts, uncles, teachers, cousins, friends, and acquaintances who I am. I have a support network stronger than a block of stainless steel. With the exception of my parents, each and every person has greeted me with open arms and congratulations on my honesty. Everywhere I go I hold my head up and stop letting the little things bother me and scare me. I found direction in my life. I've come home to myself.

Reflections

Joshua:

"Coming Home to Myself" was a piece which I thought about for months. I tried to figure out how I could tell my own story in such a way that an audience of any age and any sexual orientation could appreciate what I wrote. Finally, in an advanced writing course with my favorite English teacher (Cindy Kalland, Hopkins High School) I decided it was time to put my thoughts and experiences into writing. The entire essay took me one afternoon to write. After I wrote it, I made only small changes to problems with word choice and grammatical errors. The piece remains much as it was as I wrote it during that single afternoon. I had months to think about what I needed to say and how I would say it, so the final piece was relatively easy to write. I ended up with a piece which, I hope, touches (or at least causes one to think) regardless of age or sexual orientation.

Joshua's Teacher, Cindy Kalland: When Students Write about Sensitive Topics

Teaching a student such as Josh Helmin is not work—it's sheer pleasure. Not only is he clearly talented, but he's highly motivated and open to suggestion, minimal though my suggestions may have needed to be. Of course, sensitive subjects such as Josh's require a bit more care from the teacher than less personal ones. I have tried to establish an open atmosphere in my class by using personal narrative/reflection assignments with former students' models of writing and lists of topics illustrating both intensely private and not so private student writing. When using these kinds of assignments, I also stay away from my usual required in-class peer conferencing. Instead, I tell students they need to conference with at least two other people whom they choose either in or out of class. This way, they feel less exposed.

When I receive a paper on a sensitive subject, I respond in writing in two different ways. I make the usual comments about paragraph coherence or subject/verb agreement, but then I also write a separate "letter" to the student commenting on the content only. This is my own personal response to the piece as well as thanks for sharing/trusting, and offers of talking more if the student wishes. Sometimes if I think a student is not thinking clearly or is confused, anxious, or upset, I'll offer some gentle advice or suggestions.

I think it is our responsibility as English teachers to give kids writing opportunities which allow for expression, self-examination, and reflection as part of the hard adolescent job of identity formation. It is also our responsibility to be willing to accept what kids have to say, give them support, refer them to others who can help when appropriate, and, of course, contact the right people if we suspect danger. I can't say I had a lot to do with Josh's piece of writing—other than to give him the opportunity to write and whatever support he needed.

Personal Narrative

To See is To Know

Annaliese Werner

Richfield High School, grade 11

I've heard that to truly understand someone, you have to see the world through their eyes. Often, this task is simple. We are very similar to the people we come in contact with on a daily basis. On rare occasions, we are forced to look through eyes of experience we would rather not understand. We are forced to re-evaluate ourselves.

Last year, I was riding the city bus to my morning class at Augsburg College. The bus was nearly full, which is unusual for the middle of the morning on a week day. There were just a few blocks until my stop, and I was preparing to get off the bus.

The doors opened, but the expected passenger didn't jump on and deposit fare. A young woman stood outside the doors, struggling with a bag she had on a roll-behind cart.

Her hair was dirty and appeared to have been cut without looking. Her jeans were torn across the knee, and the skin beneath was covered with unhealed abrasions. She also had on a dingy windbreaker, which must have done little to hold off the chill of the cold winter day.

As she continued to struggle with her bag, she let out moans bordering on sobs. All the able-bodied people on the bus, including myself, sat and tried not to look. Even the bus driver failed to offer aid.

Annaliese's Reflection:

One of the biggest problems I had while writing this paper is making it say what I wanted it to. In my first drafts, I had trouble making it clear that this wasn't just an unusual experience that I promptly forgot about. I went home and cried that night, unable to process what I had been feeling and why it had taken me so long to help her. The other challenge I dealt with was not making the paper focus on me. I wanted the reader to think Wow, what would I have done? rather than thinking Geez, that must have been hard for her to deal with. Hopefully the reader will spend some time on self-reflection after reading this piece.

Poetry

Mr. McCullough

Mr. McCullough was a crabby old man
who lived next door.
Mr. McCullough's wife was dead.
His only son never visited.

Mom said, "Be nice."
Dad said, "Be polite."
Jimmy said,
"Let's smash all his windows,
with rotten apples."

Mr. McCullough yelled at us
For baseballs in his garden,
For toilet paper in his trees,
For footsteps across his yard in winter,
and for loud music late at night.

Mr. McCullough hated newspapers
He thought the whole world was a lie.
He didn't like technology,
so he didn't have a car.

All he did, all day long,
Was sit in his lawn chair,
with his hose,
Watering his precious rosebush.

In the winter,
He'd sit at his front window.
Just staring.

Mom said, "Ask him if he needs help."
Dad said, "Wave when you walk by."
Jimmy said, "Let's cut the heads off
his prized roses!"

Now I wished I had waved.
Wished I had helped out.
Now I wish I had been nice.
Because now there is no one to yell
when we trample flowers looking for
lost pop flies.
No one to yell when we climb the apple tree,
looking for ripe ones.

No familiar little old man
in a green fishing hat
sitting in a lawn chair
holding a hose.

No crabby old soul,
to frown at us when we smile.

Mr. McCullough is gone.
All that's left is his little bleak house,
with a sold sign in front.

"Oh, the poor man," Mom says.
"What a pity, a pity indeed," says Dad.
Jimmy says, with a grin,
"It's just too, too bad!"

I look out the window at all the dead roses
that I can remember always being so
springy and red.
And I feel sad.

Megan Hupp

Annunciation School, grade 8

The Colored Past

Jaidyn Maria Martin

Champlin Park High School, grade 11

*"Did you hear about the fight?"
Of course I had heard about the fight. How could I escape the constant conversation of the fight? The altercation had grabbed the entire community's attention so completely, it was interesting. How this fight changed me and my perspective is truly amazing.*

The reason the fight became such an ordeal can never really be explained. It broke out a week before spring break. It was finals and everyone was edgy. The tension could be felt everywhere as three thousand students prepared for two weeks of total teenage freedom from responsibility. This lack of order appeared to be bleeding into our studies. We could feel it deep down within us, the urge to stir, the need to break loose. Everyone was worn out and ready for something exciting. Everyone wanted something to talk about, and racism was definitely that something.

One boy – white and popular – fighting another boy – black and of a shady character. The players of this saga mounted the scandal. Specifically, the race and social status of the players and the racial slanders exchanged between the two ravaged the high school. Sides were drawn, and opinions formed based on racial outlooks. We found it hard to focus on our studies with such controversial questions being asked.

It was everywhere – among the faculty, the community, and most of all, the students. "Where do you stand on the racism issue? Do you think that what they said to one another was justified by their actions? Who are your friends?" These were the real questions being asked between the students. The faculty were asking different questions: "Will our school become known as a school with racial issues? What do you, as a student, feel about the incident? What can we do to sort things out for the betterment of the school?" For the first time in my high school career it felt as if no one, not even the adults, had an idea of what was going to happen next. None had the control to decide. With the mounting spring heat, the students became more restless, and the topic would not die down.

In most of the social studies classes, the students were asked about their thoughts on racism. There seemed to be a demand on the accelerated social studies classes to find a solution to the question, "How can we create peace in our community?" The pressure was on us to create the peace, and the truth was that we had no idea how. We were dealing with the extremely difficult problem of racism and most of us had never really considered the topic. Student Council decided to hand out yellow ribbons to advocate peace. We were all wearing them in our social studies class as we tried to create a lasting peace.

In a roundtable discussion on the issue, I began to see people differently, my friends differently, and myself differently. Amazing characters in my life, who I had just known as my friends: A.J., Pooja, Sam, and Sarah became African American, Eastern Indian, Vietnamese, and Korean. I sat there and for the first time I realized what ethnicity my friends were. Were my friends figuring out what ethnicity I was for the first time? Who was I?

I had never asked myself that question before. My mother was white – she could have been no one else but my mother to me – and my father Philipino – just plain old Dad. What was I? I was raised in America. Most of my Asian relatives lived half the world away from me. I was raised "white." I never thought of myself as ethnic, never as different, and as I sat in class, I began to wonder what I thought about myself.

Did I think I was white? What did others think of me? Was I just a girl with a tan to everyone? Was I just a girl with a tan to me?

I hadn't thought to learn about my Philipino background, or to be proud of it. We went around the circle talking about our different perspectives, and I was surprised to be somewhat left out. Most felt the pressure to be more "white." My problem was the opposite. As I listened to the other diverse students and their rich home life, I began to feel inadequate. I felt like I was too "white" and not ethnic enough. It never occurred to me to be something more different. In fact the thought of being asked about my heritage scared me for I didn't think I would have a sufficient answer.

These thoughts stewed in my head for days as I began to notice how people perceived me. The strangeness in the hallways became more intensified. The students were advised not to hang out in the hallways between classes, considering the incessant fact that many fights broke out after the first major fight. All the different ethnic groups would look at each other in the hallways, trying to decipher where everyone stood on the issue and where on the racial scale they fell. As I walked through the crowded halls of sweaty, nervous little creatures I called fellow students, I noticed no one looked at me that way. I had, in a way, blended into the masses.

Living in north Minneapolis for a small part of my pre-high school education never brought me to question multiculturalism. Our family had always been multiracial. My cousin's babies were half African American and half Caucasian; I had half Hispanic and Caucasian cousins; and my family was half Philipino and half Caucasian. I suddenly became sensitive to comments regarding multiculturalism. I overheard someone calling us the "racially watered down." I found myself very confused and I had no witty comeback to her political incorrectness. The question remained. What were we? Why was I, in particular, not to be considered ethnic enough, racially watered down? What was ethnic enough?

A while later I went to a friend's house. She was rather popular and she had influence on people's ideas. This guy who was also socially influential came over. He was nice to me, and it was obvious he kind of liked me. I was talking to someone else when a comment caught my attention. "He ripped me off; he was such a Jew." The guy said that this person was "such a Jew." I almost couldn't believe

my ears; he was implying that because this person got a good deal, he was Jewish.

I didn't want to look up; I didn't want to respond in any way. I didn't want to show that the comment had offended me or laugh nervously. I hated it. I shook it off. I reasoned to myself that I wasn't Jewish and that he wasn't making fun of me, so why should I respond. Then later that night I overheard the boy talking to one of the girls. The conversation was hard to follow considering I wasn't involved, but I understood that he was looking for a confederate flag bandana, and the girl had told him she saw one in a store and it reminded her of him. The boy smiled and told her that he thought he could "Jew his friend down to five dollars" for one. Then he turned around and said something really sweet to me. I couldn't believe it, and I didn't know where I stood on the whole matter. There I was, an ethnic person whose father emigrated from another country, a minority. I wasn't Jewish, but as a minority, I still felt threatened. He liked me, and I found that I was put into a strange position. If he only knew who I was, and more importantly what I was. It didn't even dawn on him that he was flirting with someone he pretended to hate. The hypocrisy hit me like lead. At that moment I knew him more than he knew himself. I could feel how it was to be loved and hated at the same time – to be accepted and discriminated against in the same breath.

At that moment I realized the answers to the questions being asked, and it all became very clear to me. All the confusion of the fight, the "Jew incident," and my own racial questions melted away and I was at peace. I was the most diverse and the most different. The question I had been pondering became more defined. The question wasn't "What am I?" The question became "Who am I?" I realized I had something better. I was in the middle, the girl that could see both. It wasn't up to me to form an opinion of how I felt as a minority; it was how I felt as a person dealing with intolerance in everyone and everything. I learned to understand that what makes me special isn't my heredity, it's me and all of me. My ideas, my feelings, and my future are what make me special. One day, not so far off in the future everyone will see the way I do, through education and cultural understanding. We, the multicultural, will be known, not as "half-breeds," or "racially watered-down," but many races blended into one. Then I realized, maybe one day people will see the way I see. I see the people, the lives, not the colored past.

Taken for Granted

Jenny Annunziata

Osseo High School, grade 10

As I stood outside our maroon Delta 88 waiting for my mom to get out, the cold wind brought my eyes to a water and messed my hair. For a couple of seconds I stood, body erect, surrounded by the cold darkness of the October night. I listened to the wind chimes of the trailer home exactly to the left of my grandmother's tiny brown and white one. From them came a haunting song that seemed to go from loud and angry to sad and weepy.

"Hurry up, Mom. It's getting cold out here," I said raising the tone of my voice and rolling my eyes.

"Jenny, don't start with me now," she snapped back. "I still have to get the dishes out of the trunk."

"Well," I muttered, feeling annoyed, "if Grandma would've come to the house on her way to the doctor to pick them up like she said she was, we wouldn't even be here." I rolled my eyes.

My mom shifted the medium-sized box of clattering dishes from her left arm to her right, shut the trunk and strode past me. With my arms folded across my chest, I followed directly behind her, attempting to block the skin-numbing wind.

We stood outside the white door of my grandmother's tiny tin trailer waiting for her to respond to our multiple knocks. My mom began to look impatient, and my chest began to hurt from taking in the cold autumn air. The song of the chimes seemed to die down now, no longer changing melodies. It seemed as if they were no longer interested in the situation.

"Mom, the hall light is on so she must be home," I said, wandering around the fairly large brown deck.

"Jenny, go and see if you can see into her room from the far window."

I lazily made my way down the three small steps of the deck, my annoyance growing, and peered into the window. All I could see, though, was an empty room dimly lit by the hall light. Turning to meet my mom at the front, I heard her footsteps shuffling across the gravel on the driveway. Upon reaching the gravel, though, I saw her dark form disappear around the corner of my grandmother's trailer.

"Where are you going?" I yelled.

"To check the windows on this side," she replied.

"Mom, maybe she's really not home. Maybe she went somewhere for the day and that's why she didn't come over."

"Jenny, the neighbor I talked to before we left said her car was here all day."

And sure enough, to my right was my grandmother's old black car. I looked around, suddenly feeling lonely standing there in the back yard. It was as if the blackness of the night wanted to swallow me. Overtaken by this sudden dread and my shortening tolerance for the whole situation, I made my way back to the Delta.

After 60 seconds ticked by twenty times, and my mother had circled the trailer again and again, a feeling of guilt began to settle in my stomach. Watching my mom put herself in a frenzy because her mother wouldn't answer our knocks was a painful, pathetic, yet heart-warming sight that motivated me to get out of the car and help my mom, who looked as if she was a scared young girl.

"Jen," she said in a voice slightly above a whisper. "Please go check the front windows again."

Passing by the windchimes and through the dew-covered grass, I rounded the corner of my grandmother's trailer. The sound of the chimes was muffled on that side of the trailer, and the only source of light was the pale orange glow of a corner street lamp.

Once again I skimmed the windows and saw nothing. As I went over them again, I stopped at the one looking in on the kitchen. It was the biggest of them all, reaching from the ceiling to the floor. When I looked toward the top of it, the only thing I saw was the reflection of the street lamp that stood alone on the corner. Letting my eyes fall lower, I saw the outline of the kitchen table. Falling even lower, my eyes caught the sight of a pale white figure in the lower right corner of the window. Fear draped itself over my body. I no longer felt the cold winds or heard the song of the distant windchimes. The only thing I felt was stabbing panic. With my face pressed against the glass, I cupped my hands around my eyes to get a clearer look. In an instant I recognized the pale white of my grandmother's hand.

"Mom!" I choked out. My eyes were wide and scared. All I could do was point. She looked and with no explanation, our feet swept over the wet grass, pounded on the gravel of the driveway, and bounded of the three steps of the deck. With an unknown strength my mom's shoulder followed by her hip broke down the door. Feeling the wall frantically for a light switch, I could swear I actually heard my own heart beating. In an instant the lights were on and tears filled my eyes as I looked down upon my dead grandmother who I had taken for granted.

A Perfect Picture of You

I know a word or phrase exists that paints the perfect picture of you.
But as I try to form it,
To use my words to sketch you,
I fumble and lose sight of my thoughts.

It's that Something about you!
The thing that tightens my belly
And takes my breath away.
You're the one who lifts me up
'Til I taste the sweet glow of stars.

I can't recall how it came or when it hit
How you plucked my heart from her sturdy roots.
Like a wave or darkness or an embrace,
You enfold me, surround me, guide me.

Continually amazing me,
This smile is inspired by you and
Your magical, mystical, wonderful Something.
It sweeps me away
And cradles my heart.

Julianne Nelson
Minnetonka High School, grade 11

Teacher Talk

Writing Personal Narrative

Ron Barron

Richfield High School

A personal narrative provides writers with the opportunity to recount an important event in their lives, and by doing so, perhaps gain a deeper understanding of the importance the events has or had for them. Because everyone has stories to tell, personal narratives are one of the most accessible types of writing for all age groups. In addition, narratives are usually told in chronological order, the easiest and most familiar type of organization for writers to use.

However, even though personal narratives may provide a wealth of material for writers, successful narratives depend upon what writers do with their stories. The following characteristics are common to the most successful personal narratives:

1. An appealing topic is essential, but what constitutes "appealing" varies a great deal. The best topics are ones which stretch beyond the more typical topics of personal essays, i.e., how I met a personal athletic goal rather than how I scored the winning touchdown. The following prompts may help writers locate worthwhile topics:

- An experience which had a long term effect beyond what I expected at the time it was happening
- An experience which challenged my way of looking at the world or which challenged my personal beliefs
- A seemingly meaningless incident which later proved important
- A person or place which made a strong impact on my thinking

2. Narratives rely on concrete sensory details to convey their point. These details should create a unified, forceful effect or dominant impression. Although the main component of a narrative is the story, details must be carefully selected to support, explain, and enhance the story. Using feedback from a peer response group is a good way to determine which details aid readers in connecting with a story as well as where additional details may be necessary. The quality of the details in a narrative is more important than the mere quantity of the details.

3. Narratives use the same story techniques as works of fiction. Using multiple methods of characterization and multi-sensory descriptions help bring a narrative to life for readers. Extensive reading of both fiction and nonfiction provides writers with a repertoire of techniques they can draw upon in writing their own personal narratives.

4. Sometimes dialogue can strengthen a narrative, but if dialogue is used, it should be realistic. Even though it is unlikely that writers will remember exactly what people said during the experience they have chosen as a topic, their goal should be to create plausible dialogue based upon their knowledge of the individuals involved in their narratives. In addition, the dialogue can be used to show participants' emotional state during the event which is the subject of the narrative.

5. A key component of a good narrative is that it makes clear the significance of an experience, but in the best narratives this message grows so clearly out of the story that directly stating it would be redundant. A good test of the effectiveness of a personal narrative is to ask peer responders what they believe is the significance of the experience for the writer. If the responders give the answer the writer expected, it provides corroboration that the writer's goal was achieved. If, however, the responders give some other answer, that answer provides the starting point to discuss where and what needs to be revised to reach the writer's intended goal.

In conclusion, personal narrative writers should be like oral storytellers because the best oral storytellers definitely depend upon the technique to make their stories memorable. For both types of stories, how you tell it is as important as the story you tell.

Teacher Talk

Traci's List of 10

Pre-writing Activities for Personal Narrative

Traci Gardner

National Council of Teachers of English

These prewriting exercises probably work best when combined with a more traditional technique such as using the Journalist's Questions. The idea is to ask students to think about the events that they narrate in a less typical way and then to use those thoughts to develop their narratives.

These exercises can be useful after the students have begun drafting, since they think about the details of the event that the writer can add to a working draft. For instance, after scripting a section of the narrative, writers could work on adding dialogue to their working drafts. Or after thinking about the decision points in the series of events, they can add some details to their working drafts on the reasons that the series of events occurred in the way that they did. The exercises listed below include connections to the writer's working draft, but I'd suggest cutting that part off when assigning the exercises, to help students focus on invention rather than on thinking about how to use the material later. Once they complete the exercise, I'd give them the follow-up application, focusing on their working draft of the narrative itself.

Some of the exercises make for good class or small group discussion as well. If students script pieces, they can read the scripts out loud, assigning one another parts — with the author of the script taking notes on places where the dialogue is difficult or incorrect. Using this technique, writers can find places where their attempt to capture the flow of a conversation is stilted or unrealistic.

Students also seem to enjoy sharing their writing on the event for a tabloid, an interview or as a fable — though the exercise can lead to giggling and noise. Student writers can also benefit from sharing their list of decision points, since classmates can often think of alternatives that the writers do not. By thinking through all the possible alternatives, students are better able to think about the significance of the events for the "So what?" details that they'll need in their narratives.

1. Think of the different people involved in the event that you're narrating as characters in a piece of literature. In the same way that you'd write a character sketch for characters in a short story or play, write a paragraph on each of the people involved in the event you're writing about. Once you've finished, compare the details in your sketches to the details on the characters in your draft. Revise your draft, based on the differences that you find.

2. Sketch out the events as blocks in a comic strip. Don't worry about the artwork — just use stick figures. What events would you focus on in your sketches? What parts would you leave out? Comic strips don't show every single event that occurs; they focus on the events that are necessary to the overall message. Once you've sketched out your blocks, take a look at your working draft. Are the blocks that you include in your comic strip included in the narrative? Are they recognizable — how do the blocks in your comic strip relate to the organizational structure of your narrative? Are the ones that you've left out of the comic strip included in the narrative — if so, what do they add to your overall purpose?

3. Write a version of the events in your narrative for a newspaper article. Remember to include the answers to the journalist's questions (who? what? where? when? why? how?). Focus on the facts as they occurred. Use an inverted pyramid order — begin with the facts and details that are most important to readers and end with the facts that are less important. Once you've finished, compare the article to your working draft. Have you included all the facts in your draft that you included at the beginning of your newspaper article? Are the details that you include toward the end of the article (the ones that are less important) included in your working draft — are they emphasized or subordinate? Think about what you would want someone who read that newspaper article to know that isn't included in the article itself. Are those points included in your narrative?

Teacher Talk

4. Outline the events that occur in your narrative. Identify the places where you or others involved had to make a decision of some kind. For each decision point, brainstorm on the alternatives that could have been pursued. What other options were available? Once you've thought through the possibilities, examine the way that you discuss the decisions in your draft — do you include details on the alternatives? How do these other options affect the way that you think about the event now? Have you looked back at the event that you're writing about and thought, "Gee, I wish I had done that differently"? Add some depth to your narrative by fleshing out alternatives as well as how and when they became important.

5. Choose a time in your narrative when you and other characters are talking with one another. Script out the conversation as an exchange in a play. Try to capture the language in the style that would have actually been used. Make the dialogue accurate to the event; don't worry if it's not Standard Written English (personal conversations rarely are). Once you've scripted out your dialogue, move to your working draft. How does the dialogue that you've written in your script compare to the episode in your narrative? Can you add details from the script to your draft? How would adding the dialogue affect the purpose of your narrative?

6. Describe the events that occurred for a different audience. How does your narrative change if it is written for an older family member, someone interviewing you for a job, a younger student, or someone you had never met before? What would you leave out? What would you add? What would you describe in different language and style? How would the points that you emphasize change? Once you've thought about the differences, return to your working draft. Are the points that you DO include right for your audience? Are there parts of your alternate version that can be added to your working draft? As you revise, think about the details in the narrative fit your audience in particular.

7. Reflect on the events as you recall them. Readers will want to know why you're sharing the story. Your narrative needs to answer the question, "So what?" When your readers get to the end of the story, you should have

answered the question for them. Draw a chart with three columns. Label the columns as follows:

| Events | So What Do / Did I Think? | So What Do / Did Others Think? |
|--------|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | |

Outline the major events in rows under the "Events" column; then, fill in the spaces under the other columns for each of the major events. For each of the columns, try to think about the "So What?" Explain why the event matters to you in the second column, and why the event matters to others who are involved (directly or indirectly) in the third column. Think about how the events mattered at the time and how they matter now, looking back. Once you've finished filling in the chart, move to your working draft. Are the "So what?" details that you included in the chart clear in your draft? Are there details that you can add to make the significance of the event understandable to your readers?

8. Think about the longevity of the event in your narrative. How will you remember the event five years from now? ten years? twenty-five years? As you think about the effect of the events in the narrative, you need to focus on how the events will matter to you and your readers. What kind of staying power do the events have? Brainstorm or freewrite a few paragraphs on why you think this event will still matter in the future. Once you've written about the longevity and enduring importance, move back to your working draft. When you talk about events is their staying power clear to the reader? How do you communicate the enduring qualities of the events in your narrative? What details from your brainstorming or freewriting might you work into your draft?

9. Think about the details included in your narrative — facts, sensory details, and emotions. Draw a chart like this:

| Facts | Sensory Details | Emotions |
|-------|-----------------|----------|
| | | |

Then think about the facts that are important to your narrative, and fill in the chart. Work to find at least ten important facts. For each, think about related sensory details (sight, sound, taste, touch, smell), and consider the emotions related to the facts (fear, pleasure, sadness, etc.). For instance, a fact in my narrative might be "three fresh baked loaves of bread on the kitchen table." For sensory detail, I'd write about the smell of fresh baked bread, the warmth of the kitchen from the still hot stove, and the golden brown color of the bread. For emotions, I'd write about how the loaves of bread gave me a happy feeling as I remembered how my father always bakes bread for special holidays and how my grandmother always baked us bread when we visited her. Once you've finished working through the chart for the facts from your paper, move back to your working draft. Are the sensory details and emotions that you included in the chart communicated in your draft? Revise to add details, taking material from your chart whenever you can.

10. Write an account of the events in your narrative for a fable, a tabloid, or a television or radio interview. These options give you a lot of room for creativity. What happens if the people involved in the events were animals and you had to come up with a moral? If the events were reported in a tabloid paper, what would be emphasized? Where would things be embellished? What would be left out? Finally, if you were interviewed about the event, what would you include in your story — your answer depends on where you're being interviewed (by Barbara Walters once you're rich and famous? on a talk show by Oprah? on a late night show by David Letterman or Jay Leno?) Be sure to indicate where you're being interviewed. Once you finish your alternate account of the events, move to your working draft. Are there facts that you can add now that you've thought about the events in your narrative from a different point of view? Are there facts that seem less important? Can they be deleted? Did you add details and description to your account that can be revised and added to your draft? What parts of your alternate version wouldn't make any sense at all in your final draft of the narrative?

Poetry

Puzzle

To show you who I am
I shall become a puzzle.
I've spent my life
Trying to figure out
How the small pieces of me
Will fit together
When the real beauty of me
Is in the whole.
I've spent days and nights
Stumped on where I fit in.
I only find solutions when I try.
Sometimes I don't realize
That I'm placed where I belong,
Because I've put myself in the wrong
position.
Each little part of me is unique,
And each is important.
Which makes it hard for me to find
Who I am as a whole.
In order for you to see a glimpse of who
I am
I must be somewhat together.
When I am all broken up
I seem impossible.
You will never see from a glance.
It takes time.
If you help me piece myself together
You will see a bit of me.

Madeline Helling
Annunciation School, grade 8

Using Student Models

Joseph I. Tsujimoto

from *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents*

Student poems often make the best examples; their impact is large. Mention to the class a poet's grade level and name, and you will spark immediate interest, rousing curiosity, attuning (it seems evident now) the listeners' critical ears. Not only do the students share with the poet similar experiences and sensibilities, but more importantly, the young poet shows other students the potential quality of work that *they* themselves can produce. On the other hand, if students know that a work is authored by an adult (because they have been told or because it is evident through sophistication of the language or ideas), the work will appear beyond the students' reach. Often, what makes the adult work inaccessible is not so much its language or ideas (which we can lead them to understand), it is the impossibility of their "duplicating" such work. Skills aside, they have little interest in wanting to. (This is not to say I don't use any adult examples at all. I do. The point is, they are not my primary examples.)

Finally, as we accumulate more and more examples of the students' best work, we help them establish for themselves their own literary tradition, to be used in helping them teach themselves and to become a standard for evaluating new student work.

Options and Limitations

Paradoxically, giving students *many* examples, by both students and adults, can encourage the writing of original poetry. Originality can best be realized through freedom of choice, which becomes meaningful only when one is aware of many options. So I give students as many examples as I can, not just to fire their imaginations with good works, but to increase their awareness of options as well.

First, the sheer number of examples makes students feel like emotional kaleidoscopes. Second, the redundancy illustrates the rules for [the form or assignment] and especially, the exceptions to the rules — creating more options.

In the end, freedom of choice really means freedom to select one's limitations. That is, in the act of choosing for oneself, one simultaneously imposes limitations upon oneself. Though, at first the teacher imposes the larger limitation [in the directions or assignment], the student later imposes the specific ones [in choosing the topic, theme, or tone of the poem and in selecting images and words to express these.]



Stairway to Heaven
by Meagan Bottensek
Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Turning a Required Art Review into a Poem

JeanMarie Z. Burtness

Champlin Park High School

My humanities students visited the Minneapolis Institute of Arts to view works from the Egyptian, Assyrian, Greek, Roman, and Medieval artistic time periods. For some juniors and seniors, it was their first visit back to the Institute since an elementary field trip "to see the mummy case." In the past it has been difficult to get students really excited about some of these artistic time periods, particularly the religious art, but a follow-up creative writing assignment used with a structured art review was successful in producing poems with insight about human nature.

Students spent about an hour with several docents surveying representative works and then each selected an artwork which was personally intriguing. Some rather general prompt questions guided their observing and thinking for their art review. The questions fell into four categories: factually describing what they saw; analyzing artistic design and media techniques used; interpreting the topic or story of the work and related cultural styles; and finally, creating their own educated judgments about the specific artworks. These notes were used to create an artistic analysis paper.

Many students were quite familiar with writing about literature using secondary sources and quotations; but for most, it was the first time that they had been required to write an extended essay about art they had experienced first hand. Writing the academic review was the first part in this particular assignment but it wouldn't really have to be.

Last summer in a Hamline class taught by Margot Fortunato Galt, one of the writing activities involved using historical photographs as a source for creative writing. This technique is described in further detail in her book *The Story in History*. I modified this activity for my Humanities classes with artworks from the Minneapolis Institute of Art. After the field trip, the students studied "Ode on a Grecian Urn" by John Keats and looked at similar slides of amphoras and urns. We read other poems and writings about paintings from *Transforming Vision, Writers on Art*. This book matches color plates of well-known paintings with poems and short prose pieces writ-

ten by contemporary writers.

After discussing how these poems resembled their reviews, I suggested that the students lift some descriptive phrases from their analysis papers as the basis for a first draft 'poem' with lines of three to seven words. In this particular assignment I also gave them some additional phrases to use if they wanted to wander off with creative connections. Some of the phrases were these: reminds me of, listening to the sounds, next someone will, s/he said, and I wonder if. Students did some peer conferencing to applaud phrases which were particularly vivid or packed with insight. I asked students not to rhyme or use meter but to 'philosophize' a bit. Students also spent some time adding, rearranging lines, and so forth before typing a final draft.

Students read each others' poems in class and oohed and aahed over the sentiments expressed about art works they all had viewed. I was absolutely delighted with the personal connections students developed by writing poetry about artworks five hundred to several thousand years old. A track star thought about an Olympic athlete from classical Greece; another described the horrors of war from a cuneiform bas relief; several described their own bonds with their mothers after looking at medieval madonnas; some pondered their own philosophical questions, and so on. Several students visited the Institute again to see their own artworks and the ones written about by their classmates.

Works Cited

Galt, Margot Fortunato. *The Story in History, Writing Your Way into the American Experience*. New York: Teachers & Writers Collaborative, 1992.
Hersch, Edward, Ed. *Transforming Vision, Writers on Art*. The Art Institute of Chicago. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1994.

*The Struggle in Human Society,
Reflection on Besieged Fortress Relief
(742-727 B.C.)*

The men could not stand
from the top tower;
they fell down
with their hands free.
The stones went after them,
thrown by the enemies.
The fight had started.

The carving on sandstone
with overlapping figures
and various geometric shapes.

The rough surface
touches my heart
by the curving lines
of men's faces with
thick, hard edges.

It reminds me about
the present time –
the struggle in human society.

Men always want power.
Men create war and death.
When can men be
satisfied to live happy
in a peaceful life?

I know for sure
when the desire for power ends,
when there are no jealousies,
there will be no choice
between death and survival.
I will find a world
with beautiful flowers and happy faces.

Thao Vuong

Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Những người đàn ông
trên đỉnh tháp cao,
họ té xuống khoảng không.
Những viên đá ném vào họ
bởi kẻ thù hung ác
Cuộc chiến bắt đầu.
Bức chạm trên phiến đá
với nhiều dạng hình
chồng chát lên nhau
Bề mặt sần sùi
và những đường cong
trên khuôn mặt người
làm tim tôi thắt lại
Nó làm tôi liên tưởng
đến thời hiện tại
về những đấu tranh
trong xã hội.
Con người mong muốn
quyền lực trong tay.
Họ gây ra chiến tranh,
chết chóc đầy vãy.
Đến khi nào
con người an phận
sống trong hòa bình?
Tôi tin rằng khi
không còn ham muốn
không còn ghenh ты
và sẽ không có
sự lựa chọn
giữa sự sống và chết.
Tôi sẽ thấy
một thế giới
đầy hoa đẹp và
những khuôn mặt
cười tươi rạng rỡ.

Những người đàn ông
trên đỉnh tháp cao,
họ té xuống khoảng không.
Những viên đá ném vào họ
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Họ gây ra chiến tranh,
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Đến khi nào
con người an phận
sống trong hòa bình?
Tôi tin rằng khi
không còn ham muốn
không còn ghenh ty
và sẽ không có
sự lựa chọn
giữa sự sống và chết.
Tôi sẽ thấy
một thế giới
đầy hoa đẹp và
những khuôn mặt
cười tươi rạng rỡ.



Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Thao's Reflection:

I am so glad to know that my poem will be published. I have to thanks you who gave me a chance to submit my poem and helped me correct it. Thank you very much!

As you know, I am not living in America for a long time. I have to work hard to learn English. Sometimes, that makes me not thinking about writing poems or stories. In fact, I love to write so I do some writing in my own language. Luckily, I had one poem published last year, and one poem will be published this year.

About the poem I wrote after I went to the Art Institute, when I saw the carving, it caught my attention because the carving was about the war. It made me think about the Vietnam War; the war that made many Vietnamese left their country. That carving was an excellent art work. I could see the feeling that expressed on everyone face.

Madonna and Child Enthroned

Nicola di Maestro Antonio d'Ancona

On a lap of blue and gold
plays the Child,
unaware of the duties ahead of him.
In a short time,
he will take on the forces of evil in the world,
but for now it's just play.
Above him, angels gaze through
red drapes pulled to the side,
exalting the Madonna and Child,
with their halos of shimmering gold.
The Madonna seems oblivious
to the motions of her child,
as off in a world of amazement
she ponders her gift,
the Son of God.

On the floor lies the source
of the fragrances.
The sweet smells of red flowers,
apples, and cucumbers fill the room,
their bold colors lining the steps
at the base of a throne.
These steps seem to unfold downwards,
bringing the holy duet into the foreground.

As I find myself being drawn into the scene,
I see that everyone is content.
The Madonna, the Child, the angels, and even
a small fly at the foot of the steps can be seen,
all fearing nothing, all hearing nothing,
but a gentle voice from heaven.

Kevin Gust

Champlin Park High School, grade 11



Minneapolis Institute of Arts

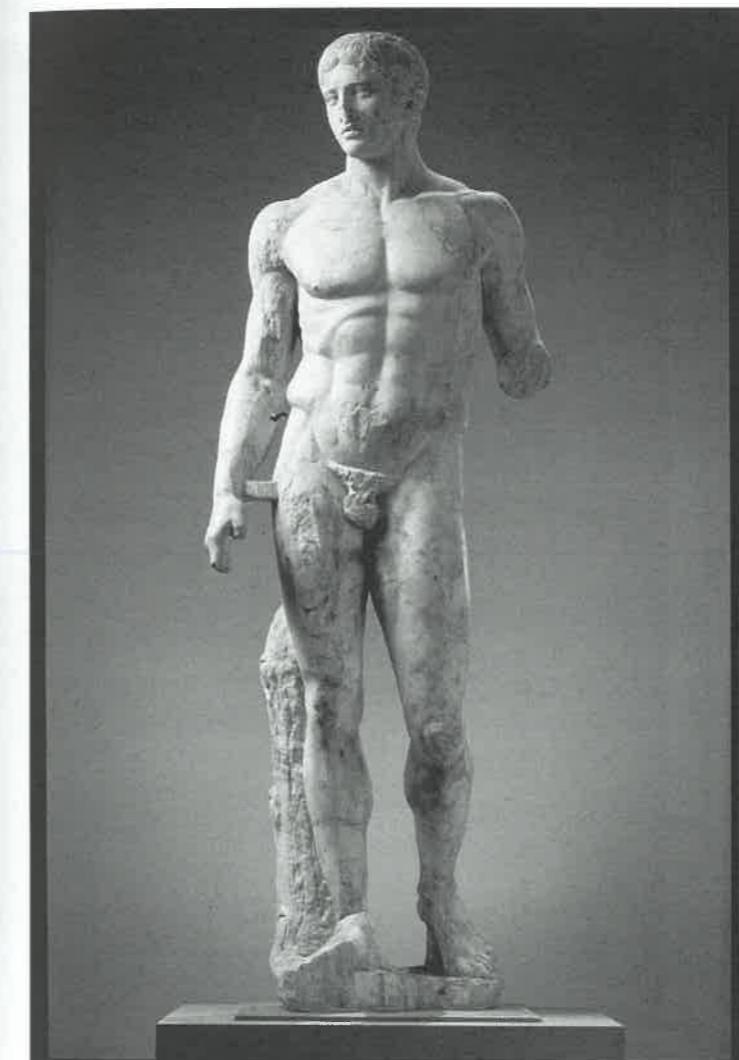
Doryphoros Stands Alone

He stands alone,
strong and beautiful.
I sit here, alone,
in awe of him.

He looks away,
with that look on his face.
I look at him,
fixed on his expression.

He's confident in his skills,
in throwing that spear.
I think he takes pleasure,
competing in such fine weather.

He has one throw left,
to prove he has a gift.
I think he's capable,
of out-throwing them all.



Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Now, he stands alone,
strong and beautiful.
I sit here, alone,
wondering if he won.

Jessica Featherston

Champlin Park High School, grade 12



Minneapolis Institute of Arts

Ivory Scene
(A reflection on a Diptych with scenes from the life of Christ)

What are they seeking?
 As they crawl and struggle,
 all in white?

What do they see?
 Faces locked in a
 final expression.

Why are they standing?
 So very close and crowded,
 one to another?

Why do they scream?
 As they are trampled,
 one over another?

What do they look for?
 Pushing and fighting,
 to be closer to it.

What are they thinking?
 Whose thoughts do they hold?
 Whose words on their lips?

Who would they tell?
 If their thoughts were unhindered?
 Only I know.

Ryan Gagnon
Champlin Park High School, grade 11

To Capture the Sorrows of a Virgin

My Mother embraces me
 with her pure adoration.
 We sit in perfect harmony
 as the breeze calmly carries life past us.
 Surrounding my presence
 is a walled garden
 which captures the sorrows of a virgin.
 Delicately patterned leaves engage my senses.

The foliage of natural hues
 are enhanced by the most intricate of flowers
 each telling its own story.
 Shadows are cast upon her
 but yet her humility and righteousness
 break that binding wall.
 Alluding to her prestige yet contradictory sorrows
 is her gown of blood red
 which reminds me
 of her bittersweet end to innocence.

Kelsey A. Dorf
Champlin Park High School, grade 11



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The Worshipped of the Buddhists

Meditating...
with his eyes mere slits,
the calmness of his posture,
just sitting there so
simple and still,
in the quietness of the hall.

This statue is for no ordinary use.
Buddha is a worshipped piece
for those who chose
to believe.

Just a robe draped over
showing the poverty,
yet the dignity.
The earthy brown
tones of his skin;
under that dusty white robe.

Traces of gold
are spread all over,
emphasizing his importance.
The slight hint of a grin,
suggests a knowledge
only known to him.

Jaci Greninger

Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Writing Poetry from Works of Art

Visual Response Poem

Theanna Grivna

Osseo High School

When I have my tenth graders write poetry, I want them to write poems with imagery rather than literal, telling-how-they-feel poems. To encourage imagery, I start by having them write poems inspired by paintings. From the book *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents* I've borrowed the term *visual response poem* and the example poem written by an 8th grader in response to Andrew Wyeth's *Christina's World*.

I've collected several Impressionist calendars and hang the artworks all over the room. First we read the Wyeth example while we view his painting. Then students are told to roam the room, select one work of art, focus on details, and then brainstorm as many phrases as they can to describe the painting. Then they're told to look deeper into the paintings for an emotion or a relationship. We look back at the Wyeth example in which the poet, in the first stanza, describes the ruins and the woman in the painting, and in the second stanza imagines when the farm was new and the woman was a child. I also use Osseo Senior High student examples from the past years in which Monet's ice floes battle against a river for control or in which Pissarro's red roofs are a refuge from a literally and figuratively cold world.

As students stroll through this impromptu art gallery, there are a lot of spontaneous conversations about the art works, the images, and their reactions to the pictures. These discussions often serve as prewriting as students clarify their ideas or are inspired by the insights of another student. Then students draft their poems.

Any paintings would likely work. I put up paintings with and without people in them. I think more successful poems have been written on nature paintings, but students like both choices.

Works cited

Tsujimoto, Joseph I. *Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents*. Urbana, IL: ERIC Clearinghouse & NCTE, 1988.

Ekphrastic Poetry

Sandy Hayes

Becker Middle School

I originally wrote a different article for this space about finding artwork to display, but just before publication, there was a discussion thread on NCTE-Talk about writing poetry in response to works of art in which the term *ekphrastic poetry* was used. This paradoxical poetic form is defined by W. J. T. Mitchell as the "verbal representation of a visual representation." Considering the truth behind the aphorism that a picture says a thousand words, it seems an impossible task to capture an artwork in the few words used in a poem. But Rusche also writes of ekphrastic hope -- "the phase when the impossibility of ekphrasis is overcome in imagination or metaphor, when we discover a 'sense' in which language can do what so many writers have wanted it to do: 'to make us see.'"

In addition to discovering such a scholarly consideration of a poetry activity that, like Theanna Grivna, I have done for several years with 8th graders, I was surprised to find that many poets have written poems based on works of art. A sampling:

W. H. Auden, Musee des Beaux Arts
Walter de la Mare, Brueghel's Winter
Ferlinghetti, [The Wounded Wilderness of Morris Graves]
Robert Forster, Breughel's Harvesters
Alan Ginsberg, Cezanne's Ports
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, The Cross of Snow
John Stone, Three for the Mona Lisa
John Stone, American Gothic
May Swenson, The Tall Figures of Giacometti
William Carlos Williams, Landscape with the Fall of Icarus
A more extensive list of poets and poems as well as links to the text of the poems and to the works of art compiled by Harry Rusche of Emory University can be found at
www1.cc.emory.edu/ENGLISH/classes/Paintings%26Poems.original/titlepage.html

Works cited

Mitchell, W.J.T. *Ekphrasis and the Other*. www.rc.umd.edu/editions/shelley/medusa/mitchell.html
NCTE-Talk. To subscribe to this discussion list, go to www.ncte.org

Monet's Waterlilies

Lilies lie
On the bold, blue water
Trying
Unsuccessfully
To escape
The tightening
Solitude

A tree limb hanging above
Shades a corner
of the lily patch
From the
Outside world
The lilies stand alone



Brett Bellin

Osseo High School, grade 10

*Salvador Dali's
The Persistence of Memory*

Upon a distant shore
denizens of the earth
feasting
devouring.
Day becomes night
years pass as moments
clock lay tortured
contorted.
The landscape remains unchanged
unscathed by the passing eons
the ocean's surface frozen in mid-tide.

Josh Salisbury

Becker Middle School, grade 8

Amanecer

Midnight water
Edged in purple ice
Residing in darkness
Waiting.

Grey sky
Fades to orange
At the horizon
In anticipation.

Soft, dark puffs
Suspended above
Announce
In fiery fanfare
The blazing entrance.

Melissa Wolfe

Osseo High School, grade 10

*Claude Monet's
Gare Saint Lazare*

Gray November
Trains rattle down tracks.
Conductors yell.
The clanking
of cold metal,
smells of coal
and the coming
winter creep through
the station.
A woman,
in a dark blue dress
sits waiting,
wrapped in
her loneliness,
monotony.
Oblivious
to the child
standing
at her side.

Mary Cummings

Osseo High School, grade 10

*Andrew Wyeth's
Christina's World*

The sky's a dull blue
The grass is whittling away.
Still with my little hands
I search for my mother.
The pain that I feel
The thought of being lonely for the rest of my life.
My mother left me,
Left me to die in the grass.
Why did she leave me?
Why did she leave me to die in the dead grass?
For I'll fade away,
And no one would ever have known. . .
I existed.

Kandace Green

Becker Middle School, grade 8

Models and Patterns

Using a model poem as a pattern is an effective way to introduce students to poetry writing. Betsy Lasch, a 7th grade teacher in New Prague, submitted student poems modeled after a poem published in *Read* magazine. An outline of the structure follows. In using models students should feel free to break out of the pattern for their own purposes, as these students did.

Sea Blue

Don't let me get trapped in one of
Those artificial worlds
Where everything is frozen dinners and
bologna sandwiches
20% rayon and 80% acrylic
Rap
I want to live sea blue, crimson red, sunset
yellow
Cotton and leather
The bright stars in the midnight sky
The river at dawn
Don't let me live small-minded
Not seeing past my front door
Or through rose-colored glasses
I want to float
Drift
Glide
Like a leaf in the fall
Let me hold a rainbow
In the jar near my bed
Let me keep a wild stream
In my jewelry box

Lizette Lybeck

New Prague Middle School, grade 7

Nerds

Please don't let me get trapped
in one of those nerdy worlds,
where everything is calculators,
extra assignments for fun
55% pocket protectors 45% suspenders,
oldies,
I want to live bright blue, vibrant violet,
and
ravin red
satin and silk
the beach at midnight after curfew,
the forest in the fall.
don't let me live mundane,
with my eyes seeing through glasses,
and my nose in a book.
I want to dream,
run,
party,
like a wild child.
Let me catch the stars
and hold them in my hand
let me capture the clouds,
and hold them in my heart

Katelyn M. Kennedy

New Prague Middle School, grade 7

A Poem for All of Us

Please God don't let me get trapped
in one of those perfect worlds
where everything is perfect and plain
99% smartness 1% average
opera

I want to live sterling silver, bright blue, and sun
yellow
graphite and satin
the wind at midnight
the sun at noon
don't let me live spoiled
with my head in school
or on the couch
I want to fly
spin
zoom
like a fighter jet
let me frame the mountains
and hang them in the kitchen
let me keep the tropical rainforest in my shower.

Mike Goldsmith

New Prague Middle School, grade 7

Don't let me get trapped in _____ world
where everything is (two nouns that relate to the first
line)
percentage of "ingredients"
(music that relates to the adjective)
I want to live (three colors)
(two contrasting fabrics)
(image from nature) at (time)
Don't let me live _____
or _____
I want to (3 verbs)
like _____
Let me keep (or synonym)
Let me keep (or synonym)

Shadow Lovers

Megan Johnson

Cook County High School, grade 9

I wish I may, I wish I might have this wish I wish tonight. It was a starry night long, long ago when my grandfather told me this story. I always thought that it was just a tale, but now I am grown and I know the truth. . .

Salena. She was an old peddler woman by day. She wore a drunken smile as she sold her potions and pixie dust. Salena was a gypsy traveler. She would read your palm for fifty cents and tell you your future in her old cracked crystal ball for just a touch more. But these things were nothing but rubbish and Salena knew that. It was all in the way she presented it. She was an actor in heart and she played her part perfectly. She could sense people's feelings when they came to her. She could tell what they wanted to hear and that is what she told them. Everyone left her tent happy and sent others to her; that is how gypsies make a living, and Salena knew that. Salena wasn't happy with her life as a fortuneteller; she wanted more, and that is why she *lived* at night.

The night has fallen. A silent shadow dances lightly in the streets. Up and down the walks it goes until at last it reaches its destiny – a small dark tent amongst brightly painted caravans. The shadow slips inside. In the corner of the tent Salena sleeps, curled up in a tight ball, her blankets pulled tightly against her to keep out the cold. The shadow touches the old woman, strokes her cheek gently and then enters the old woman's body. A second later two shadows emerge from Salena's body and dance together in the middle of the tent. Then together they slip out of the tent hand-in-hand. They sail through the air and dance on the water – just dance. When the moon starts to drop and the sun starts to rise, the two shadows slip back to the cold, dark tent and Salena's abandoned body. The shadows part, and Salena's body stirs as a shadow enters.

Her eyelids flutter, then open. She slowly pushes herself up, her joints creaking with old age. Today is the day, she tells herself, today is the day she will dance forever with her shadow lover. She's had enough of this life and she's lived enough. She stands, naked, in the middle of her tent and waits. The shadow comes. It strokes Salena's cheek and then enters into her body. A second later two shadows emerge hand-in-hand. Salena's body slumps to the ground, and the shadows dance out of the tent and down the street, out of the town, never to be seen again. . .

It was my grandfather who found her that day, naked, slumped on the ground with that drunken smile on her face, and he knew. He knew.

And I've seen them, those two shadow lovers dancing down the streets when they think that no one is watching. But I am. I've watched them more than once as I wished on my stars, and I know. I know.



The Sea-Child

Connie Cheng

Capitol Hill Magnet, St. Paul, grade 8

They swim together in the sea of liquid sapphire, tail and flippers waving in time to the endless tempo of the tides. Light streams down from the surface, so far above, and dances across their backs.

She turns her head and rises from them alone. The water foams and froths about her as she breaks through the sky of her world and enters a new world. Carried by the waves, she gently drifts upon the sandy shore.

Flippers turn into fingers, tail turns into toes. Silken fur falls away to reveal smooth skin. She stands upright and throws the sealskin aside, marveling at this strange realm.

They come silently, swiftly. They seize her, muttering strange words. She screams, but no one answers her call. She can only watch helplessly as the strangers take her sealskin and walk away. Her gate back into her world is barred and locked. . .

Thalassa awoke with a start, gray eyes staring into the darkness at something that wasn't there. *It's that dream again*, she thought. *Always that same dream.*

Brushing her dark hair out of her face, she rolled out of bed and walked to the window. She flung it open, breathing in the crisp sea air.

For as long as Thalassa could remember, she had always dreamed of the sea, the seal, and the skin. She didn't know why, but these dreams always filled her with a deep longing, a yearning for something she couldn't identify. Thalassa frowned as she gazed at the sea, pounding the shoreline a mere one hundred paces from her window. The rhythm of the waves always soothed her.

"Thally!" Her mother entered the room, worried face framed by wispy blond curls. "Thally! Are you all right?"

"Yeah," Thalassa replied, not turning her head.

Her mother swept over to the window. "Please close that window. The cold sea air is going to make you sick."

"But, Mom. . ."

Thalassa's mother ignored her and shut the window, closing out all sounds of the surf. Thalassa sighed and climbed back into bed.

"Sleep tight now, honey, okay? Good night." Her mother left Thalassa alone in the suffocating silence.

"See you later, Mom!" Brad shrieked over the roar of the school bus engine. He bounced up the steps and into an empty seat, waving hysterically. Thalassa followed, sliding into a seat near the back of the bus.

Two girls in the seat across from her stared at her. Thalassa knew who they were. They were the most popular girls in the entire eighth grade, and (in her opinion) the brattiest. The girls kept whispering to each other and laughing, never taking their eyes off her. Thalassa kept her eyes straight ahead, staring at the font of the bus where Brad's blond hair bobbed up and down.

Looking at Brad's hair reminded her. She was *different*. She was the only one in the family with dark hair and funny gray eyes. Everyone else — even Rose, her sister who had been lost in a boating accident — was blond. Sometimes, when Thalassa fought with her older sister Elise, Elise would say, "Well, you're not one of *us*. You came from somewhere else!"

And then her parents would come, and tell her she was part of the family, she was just like the rest of them, she *belonged* here. However, Thalassa was sure they never met her eyes when they said that.

"Today, your homework is pages 60-61. Read the poem, and answer the questions. You are dismissed."

The voice of the English teacher rang through the classroom, but it was drowned out by the joyous shouts of students as they rushed out the door, escaping from the last class of the day. Thalassa stayed behind, staring at the poem.

Irish Legend

*They bore a daughter, a fair child was she;
But despair was theirs — she was taken by the sea.
But as the sea takes, it gives in return;
A sea-child was found upon the sand of the morn.*

*Tread softly, my sea-child, wake not thy kin;
Fingers feeling blindly, for the sea skin.
Feet into flippers, skin into fur;
Back into thy world, beloved sea-daughter.*

"Beautiful, isn't it?" Her English teacher had walked up behind her.

"Mm. . . yeah," Thalassa mumbled.

"The Irish used to tell tales of seals who turned into humans. *Silkies*, I believe they were called." He paused. "There are some American tales of silkies as well. . ."

At dinner, Thalassa's father said he had good news for the family.

"Really, Dad? Tell me, now!" Brad pounded his spoon on the table.

"Well. . ." His father stood up and cleared his throat importantly. "I got a new job in the city. We're going to move there in a few months."

Everyone cheered wildly. Except for Thalassa. *The city*, she thought. *It will be so far away from the sea. . .*

She didn't think she could bear it if she was separated from the sea. She loved the sea, the ebbing of the tides, the pounding of the surf, the feel of sand beneath her feet, and the occasional herd of seals. Every day, after school, she would go swim in its waters. It brought back memories that she couldn't quite recall. However, her parents feared for her safety. "We lost Rose," they said. "And we don't want to lose you."

Her pleas fell upon deaf ears. Elise and Brad told her she was acting funny, and her mother told her she was being selfish. "This is going to be a wonderful opportunity for our family," she said. "Please don't ruin it. We can visit the beach in the summer."

Thalassa sat by the seashore, lit by the midnight moon, and scooped up a handful of sand. It ran through her fingers, as swiftly as the past few months had gone by. The suitcases were packed and the car was loaded. They would move tomorrow, to the apartment. Her father had brought pictures of it home. It was a strange, forbidding place — all wood and stone, no water. Nothing she loved. Thalassa sighed.

She reached down to scoop up another handful, and felt something soft beneath her fingers, like velvet. Startled, she stroked it again, and felt a tingle run through her whole body. It was so familiar. . .

And then the memories, the long forgotten memories flooded into her. The dream, the poem, the legend. . . it all came alive, it all made sense! Thalassa dug frantically in the sand, until she unearthed the object. She knew what it was even before she pulled it out and held it up to brush the sand off.

"I am the sea-child," she whispered, tears sparkling in her eyes. "The sea took Rose, but it gave me. . ."

Then seals were all around her, nuzzling her with velvety noses. She pulled on the skin, feeling the transformation taking place, feet into flippers, skin into fur. . .

Her mother sat up in bed, heart pounding, one word upon her lips. "Thalassa." A sudden fear seized her. The sea was about to take another child. She sprang out of bed and hurried to the window.

She saw nothing but a solitary seal, gazing back at her wistfully before slipping silently into the sea.

Crush

Clarissa Willeke

Edina High School, grade 11

Maybe it was better that way. The less she knew about his personality, the less she knew about his warts, the more she could create. She could lie in bed and dream up their first date, filled with fragrance and blossoms and the sizzle of her palm on his. As she slumped, bored and uncomfortable within the cold steel confines of a desk, her drooping eyelids could play host to a continuous reel of action adventures, each one bigger and better than the last. Following her careful choreography, they would parachute food into starving countries, stalk criminal masterminds, and pilot hijacked planes to safety. Fantasizing had always been an escape for her; the tantalizing question *So what if we were stranded on a deserted island together?* never failed to transform the monotonous drone of the domains and derivatives into the gentle lapping of azure water against shimmering sand.

Of course, they were not stranded on a deserted island, but in high school. No matter how elaborately she created, that stifling, buzzing, cigarette-smoking reality invariable mashed her daydreams under its platform-clad foot. And in the reality of high school, the perfect boy was always perfectly out of reach. *Such is life*, she mused, *that the boy of my dreams has a gorgeous girlfriend*. His girlfriend was one of those delicate goddesses whose wardrobe consisted of a pastel for every occasion — a petal pink cardigan on Monday and a buttercup sweater on Tuesday. His girlfriend's taut skin defied nature, glowing bronze even against the tall frosty drifts of January. His girlfriend had the lithe, graceful body expected of the Minnesota Youth Ballet's prima ballerina. Granted, she too danced, but she spent her dance classes struggling to land a single pirouette amidst the plump, tottering, elderly students of Ballet for Beginners.

Perhaps some day he'll see through his girlfriend's beauty, hear the hollow ringing behind his girlfriend's golden ears, she would think to herself, but she knew it would be a distant day. Even in his idealized form, he was still a teenage boy, and she could not disregard the hypnotic power of hormones. Yet she still found herself raising her hand for no reason in history class, trying to spout off elegant expla-

nations for the Crash of '29 and hoping that he would respond; that his arm would ascend lazily into the air and that he would huskily denounce speculation as the evil that had brought down the nation.

She was puzzled by what drew her to him so strongly. He wasn't all that cute, maybe even a little gawky, and he was definitely not hot. He lacked the clean cut, slightly feminine features that enamored so many girls. Then again, she had made it a rule to never like a guy prettier than herself. He was tall — she avoided diminutive crushes because she had a terrible aversion to the idea of liking anyone dwarfed by her younger brother. Caught in his mysterious charisma, she was continually surprised by the way his squint brown eyes and nondescript blond hair could set her heart thumping.

The red Cadillac now off in the unseen distance, she stirred from her reverie. Homework, the all-consuming task that draped itself across her afternoon, soon shoved him from her consciousness. As she maneuvered her little lavender car into the grocery store parking lot later that evening, she contentedly hummed along with the radio. She hummed "Joy to the World" as she slammed the car door shut, hummed "Joy to the World" as she strolled across the parking lot, hummed "Joy to the World" as her

Lilac

The sweet array of my favorite lavender flower
fills the Cierra's air.
Not even three different cigarettes
can put out this sun.
He puts his arms around me
and pulls me close.
I forget all time and reason.
Desire reigns supreme
and passion drips gently off my delicate fingertips.
His tongue plays with my lips coyly.
He knows what he is doing.
I feel myself becoming him
and I am alive inside.
I slowly step out of the car
and all I recall are lilacs.

Abby Marquart

Champlin Park High School, grade 12

Moonlight

Danielle Hagen

Edina High School, grade 11

an earth-stained fist. The shafts of light drifted through the window and splintered against the beige hospital wall in jagged, irregular shards. Rosemary's eyes were transfixed by the moon. The swollen sphere had cocooned itself in the inky folds of the night. Rosemary envied the lunar globe its radiance, its iridescent beauty. As she gazed, she coveted the moon's incredible autonomy and authority. The moon possessed the power to engulf the whole earth in its light. It was a more elegant, subtle force than the sun, which scraped the soil with its burning claws. The moon existed in a state of virtually unattainable perfection.

Barely cognizant of her doing so, Rosemary quietly rose from the confines of her bed. As she slid first one, then the other fragile foot onto the cold hospital tile, she faintly heard the stretching and snapping of the tubes and wires that bound her to her bed, and by extension, the world in which she was held captive. The shrill keening screams emitted by various machines were the only other indicators of the revolution occurring in Room 466.

Rosemary glided more than walked to the window. The shower of moonlight radiating from beyond the glass transformed her body into a frail silhouette. As she carefully opened the window to the invasion of the chill night air, Rosemary slid the screen from the window with seemingly practiced fingers. She crept onto the windowsill with a feline adeptness that defied her weakened state.

Balancing on the window ledge, Rosemary ventured a glance into the world from which she had so long been excluded. What she saw filled her with giddy exhilaration. The view from her fourth floor window was spectacular. The hospital grounds were coated in a sheen of drifted snow. Trees stood with their distorted, envious fingers reaching toward the perfect night. Rosemary's gaze traveled upwards and she gasped at the awe-inspiring display of lunar power. The moon appeared to overtake the expanse of sky.

Rosemary's eyes brimmed with tears of freedom and release. She gave one last gaze around her tired room. Then she closed her eyes, took a deep, contented breath, turned. . . and embraced the moon.

Now the harvest moon had risen and moonbeams streamed from the night sky like grains of sand scattered from

Reflection

Danielle's Reflection:

Being a writer for an alternative student magazine, I am required to write several pieces of short fiction per school year. Unfortunately, I often have an inability to write while I'm trying to meet a deadline. As a result, I usually cross my fingers and hope for a random burst of creativity. With Moonlight, I got lucky. Around the time I wrote Moonlight I had recently read an article concerning the right of critically ill patients to euthanasia, which influenced the story line. Although this story was not intended to be a direct commentary on that topic, the notion of freeing oneself from unhappy circumstances presented itself as a possible theme for a story. However, I was unable to pin down any specific story line to match the theme until, looking out my window at 3 a.m., I saw the large full moon, ran down to my computer, and wrote Moonlight in about three hours. Many people who read this story complained of how "dark" it was, which rather surprised me because I had not really intended for the focus to be suicide. I deliberately left the conclusion a bit vague, so as to place the focus of the story not on death or life, but on the freedom to choose.



I Love this Song by Allison Hodge

Champlin Park High School, grade 9

Teaching Notes

The short stories in this section have some unique features that teachers could highlight in mini-lessons, giving developing writers additional options for choices in their own writing.

Shadow Lovers — Megan Johnson

- * Narrator is outside the story and creates a flashback frame for the story.
- * Skillful building of mood/tone that matches the content of the story.
- * Effective closing for a high school writer. Strong parallel phrasing makes a strong ending.

The Sea-Child — Connie Cheng

- * Story framed by the opening dream; symmetry with Thalassa's transformation at the end.
- * Smoothly embeds background information:
 - * fact of Rose's death.
 - * background information about silkie legend given in English assignment.
- * Formatting aids the reader. Thoughts are set off in italics. Time breaks are shown by extra line breaks.
- * Foreshadowing is heavy-handed by adult standards, but this technique is used very adeptly for a developing middle school writer. The foreshadowing is developed by:
 - * the dream
 - * Rose's death
 - * Thalassa not fitting into her family (coloring, her odd name, her own uneasiness, parents not meeting her eye)
 - * The poem
 - * Family moving away from the sea
 - * Thalassa drawn to sea, often swimming
 - * Title of story
- * All dialog serves a purpose; doesn't get caught up in empty answers or one word volleys.
- * Skilled embedding of original poem — effective device for adding needed fairy tale background, but a very lovely poem in its own right.
- * Captures the tone of a slightly dark fairy tale/fantasy.

Crush — Clarissa Willeke

- * Very strong use of snapshot details to build impression of character — the Cadillac and how he drives it tells us a lot about the boy's character (or his character as idealized by the narrator). Strong word choice in developing the snapshots.
- * The interior nature of this story is handled very effectively in third person. The third person treatment is less typical for adolescent writers but gives a distance to the piece that allows a slightly wry view of the infatuation.
- * The encounter in the grocery store is a full-color snapshot. Skillful choice of details develops almost a mini-movie; builds reader identification with the main character.
- * Juxtaposition with the rap lyrics at the end of the story may be too obvious for an adult writer, but creates a more sophisticated conclusion for an adolescent writer — it's almost an "in joke" as readers recognize the song. This would be a good example to caution writers about making references that date the story or that would soon become obscure. Quoting the line from the song minimizes the likelihood of future readers being lost at the end and missing the irony.

Moonlight — Danielle Hagen

- * Striking snapshots with vivid, fluent word choice, creates very strong images for the reader.
- * Setting details skillfully create mood.
- * Skillful use of tiny details packed with meaning (for example, the nurse's name badge in contrast with the atmosphere of the hospital room).
- * Mature content of the story is sensitively handled.
- * Danielle's reflection is a glimpse into a mature writing process: getting topic ideas by making connections and making intentional decisions about effect.

The Hardest Part

Katie Oyler

Minnetonka High School, grade 12

When times look bleak in Charles Frazier's Cold Mountain, Inman wishes he could sprout wings and fly off, whereas his sweetheart, Ada, wants to hide under a giant boxwood bush. Inman imagines himself escaping to high tree limbs, while Ada would rather bury herself beneath the branches; however, both feel too weak sometimes to face a world they see rapidly slipping away. At first, they can't summon such strength because they are empty. Inman is so insubstantial he could float right past the clouds, and Ada might just wither into the ground. When hopelessness sets in, their souls become frail, the way Inman's friend, Swimmer foretold, and their spirits threaten to die inside their bodies. But in the end, Ada and Inman don't crumble; they endure. Both survive by filling their emptiness with memories, faith, and the long work at hand. The specifics differ, but the process remains the same.

Inman's journey, for instance, refers in large part to actual miles covered. He has to put distance between himself and the Civil War, which ravaged his soul along with his body. He fears Swimmer's assertion that a man can live, an empty shell, with no spirit to fill him. At the hospital, in the goat woman's caravan, and with Ada in the Cherokee cabin, he worries that he has been broken beyond repair. Unable to see God through all the killing, unable to find Him even in himself, Inman becomes the "wart and wen"

from Monroe's Emerson-inspired sermon. Heading home to Cold Mountain provides the only chance for him to rekindle "a necessary reason for [his] being" and to fend off "the long shadow of untimely oblivion" (77).

Along the way, Inman finds solace in untainted memories. He remembers beauty. Swimmer's "fine ball racquet of hickory" that "powered it user with the speed and deception of a bat" (21). The way Ada looked in church, with "two faint cords of muscle running under the skin on either side of her white neck" and "curls too fine to be worked up into the plait" (78). His homeland, "the big timber, the air thin and chill all year long, where Tulip poplars grew so big through the trunk they put you in the mind of locomotives set on end" (85). Everything reminds him of that which he lost in the ensuing years. He compares the scrubby pines, hardwood stumps, and poison ivy beds he sees to the land where he was from, a place where "the word *river* meant rocks and moss and white water moving fast under the spell of a great deal of collected gravity" instead of a "shit-brown clog to his passage" that "bore more likeness to molasses as it first thickens in the making than to water" (84). Other times, he contrasts the ugliness around him with picturesque passages from Bartram's *Travels*. At night, he recreates Bartram's scenes and dreams of Ada.

Teacher Reflection

Sue Sinkler - Minnetonka High School

Writing well about literature starts with reading well. Katie's essay is good because she understands Cold Mountain. Students who have had ongoing, lush, complex interactions with words in and out of the classroom write well. So a good essay starts with good reading and is assisted by good discussions that explore the novel. Keeping the novel and its words at the center of the English class allows students to know a piece of literature and feel the satisfaction of such knowing.

Katie's essay moves back and forth through the novel, touching on and selecting details, and then discerning (or imposing) patterns and connections. As a reader she "sees" the design of the novel, the interplay of images and ideas. Katie has also been explicitly taught during her three years in high school the concept of designing her essays, or composing. She understands that an essay gives a particular shape to her thoughts, a shape that communicates clearly and gracefully. She crafts each sentence, each paragraph and she understands that this is a time-consuming process.

crow's midflight death. One evening, he finds Orion at the eastern horizon and takes comfort in the fact that he can name its brightest star Rigel. He thinks back to sitting in a ditch at Fredericksburg and showing the same star to a fellow soldier. The boy dismisses it, claiming that Rigel is only the name of a man attached to the star, not God's name for it. He calls it "a lesson that sometimes we're meant to settle for ignorance" (117), and points to the fighting as evidence of what comes from knowledge. Inman thought him a fool then, but in the months since he began to wonder "if the boy might have had a point about knowledge, or at least some varieties of it" (117).

Inman's belief in the boy's words deepens along with the pain he endures, while his faith in God and in "the right order" (397) steadily diminishes. By the time he escapes from the Home Guard and kills Junior, Inman starts to fear that "the minds of all men share the same nature with little true variance" (234) and that "the crows had swelled out to blacken everything" (235). Later, when the goat woman tells him that God made memories of Pan more ephemeral than those of bliss as a sign of His care, Inman scoffs. He tells her that he wouldn't "want to puzzle too long about the why of pain nor the frame of mind somebody would be in to make up a thing like that to begin with" (277).

As his journey continues, though, Inman proves her right. He thinks less and less about the war, and devotes more attention to fond memories of Ada and hopes for a future with her in it. Even when dark voices insist that he is too far ruined, with "fear and hate riddling out [his] core like heartworms," Inman manages to sustain himself by "thinking forward to what great pleasure it would be to hold [his] grandchildren on [his] knee" (397). After their reunion, he and Ada fantasize about growing old together, "measuring time by the lifespans of a succession of speckled bird dogs" (434) and bringing their children to see the arrowhead buried in a poplar tree.

Though Inman is shot long before those days ever come, the thoughts serve their purpose. They fuel him when he is empty. They keep his feelings for Ada strong. And when he finally reaches her, they allow him to speak candidly. He tells her about the first time he saw her as she sat in the church pew, the waste of years since then, and all his grief. But his anger and bitterness quickly fade. Instead, he kisses the back of her neck, the way he always wanted, and finds "redemption of some kind... in such complete fulfillment of a desire so long deferred" (421). They share stories all night, though Inman avoids talking about the war and its tales of "one gang of despots launching attacks upon another" (432). He prefers to tell her about watching Orion rise each night as he walked and about the people he met when he stopped. When he gets to explaining what the goat woman said

about God, Ada supposes that one has to give Him some help in forgetting or else the bad thoughts will return. The chance to hold Ada tight and to hear her voice is all the help Inman needs. That night, when they conceive their daughter, the cabin "was a place that held within its walls no pain nor even a memory collection of pain" (430).

Thus, Inman's death is not tragic. If he had been killed by the Home Guard or the Federals or the angry townspeople, so much the waste. If he had died feeling hollow and heartsick, then it would be pitiable. But that's not the way it happens. Rather he makes it back to Ada and leaves her with child. He conquers the pain and anger he feared would devour him. He dies so full of life he believes that "everything had been taken out of him for a purpose. To clear space for something better" (438). He is redeemed.

And the world Inman leaves will carry on without him, as it did while he was away. That Ada lives and flourishes after his death is a testament to her growth over the preceding months. Before, such trauma would have sent her scurrying for the safety of the nearest bush or haystack, like when her father died. But while Inman moves physically toward contentment, Ada undergoes an internal change. Beginning with the arrival of Ruby, she slowly learns to survive on her own and to see outside of herself, in a way Monroe's constant care and attention never allowed.

At first, she tries to put Ruby in Monroe's role, but Ruby refuses to dole on her, nor will she be her slave. Ruby starts small. Though she "did not expect Ada to do the cooking at breakfast, she did expect her, at a minimum, to be there to watch its conclusion" (103). While Ruby makes plans for winter, Ada daydreams. To Ada, "Ruby's monologues seemed composed mainly of verbs, all of them tiring. Plow, plant, hoe, cut, can feed, kill" (104). Like Inman, when the going gets tough, Ada escapes to her memories. When Ruby trades the piano for ham and corn grits and a half a dozen mountain sheep, Ada thinks back to the last time she played it, the night she sat in Inman's lap and told him she wanted to stay there forever. Other times, she shares her memories with Ruby, who never appreciates them as much. When Ada tells her about Blount, the arrogant suitor who bragged about going to war and driving back the North, but who later cried and admitted his fear of the fighting that lay ahead, Ruby "could only marvel at lives so useless that they required missing sleep and paddling about on a river for pleasure" (144). She misses the point entirely.

But Ruby's world is equally foreign to Ada, especially in matters of faith. After all, Ada grew up learning from Monroe that God works through elaborate analogy, with "every bright

image in the visible world only a shadow of a divine thing" (377), and with everything revolving around humanity. Ruby, on the other hand, finds spiritual purpose in nature's every mundane detail, assuming "the twittering of birds to be utterance as laden with meaning as human talk" (175) and expressing "great respect for the normally reviled crow, finding much worthy of emulation in their outlook on life" (176). Rather than die in the absence of pleasing food, crows relish what presents itself. In that way, Ruby sees the good in crows rather than the bad, and models herself accordingly.

So, too, does Ada model herself after Ruby. She begins to derive pleasure from hard work, and to see order and purpose in the cycle of nature. She wants to clear some trees around Black Cove to make notches for keeping track of the path of the sun. She imagines watching "with anticipation as the sun drew high to the notch and then on a specified day fell into it and then rose out of it and retraced its path" (330). She figures that "such a thing would place a person, would be a way of saying, You are here, in this one station now. It would be an answer to the question: Where am I?" (330).

As this reverence grows, she stops trusting Monroe's old formulas. Crossing a thinly frozen creek, she knows Monroe "would have made a lesson of such a thing... He would have said what the match of that creek's parts would be in a person's life, what God intended it to be the type of" (377). Further, Monroe would have seen the crow's "blackness, its outlaw nature, and its tendency to feast on carrion" as a "type of the dark forces that wait to overtake a man's soul" (377), whereas Ruby admired the same bird's "keenness of wit, lack of pridefulness, and slyness in a fight" (176). Ada doesn't completely abandon the former idea for the latter; rather, she accepts that both have merit, and that both can be true.

This way, she can finally understand Inman's story about the portals of the Shining Rocks. The first time she hears it, she dismisses it, saying, "Well, that was certainly folkloric" (252). Incredulously, she asks him if he takes it for the truth. To Ada, that meant having seen it happen or having read a well-documented account. Her definition of *truth* was so narrow. When they meet again, however, at the abandoned Cherokee village, of all places, Ada has broadened her view. The story speaks to her now because, like the Kanuga people, she has glimpsed a better world with Inman, but one that she cannot have. Much as they'd like to, Ada and Inman cannot be together so long as the war continues.

They try to devise a plan, but their options are few. Inman could return to the war, a choice he rejects as unacceptable. Or

he could "stay hidden in the mountains or in Black Cove as an outlier and be hunted like bear, wolf, or catamount" (436), an equally unappealing prospect. They entertain wilder notions like heading out west, sailing to Spain, or waiting at the portals of the Shining Rocks, before deciding that Inman should "cross the mountains north and put himself in the hands of the Federals, the very bastards who had spent four years shooting at him. They would make him sign his name to their oath of allegiance, but then he could wait out the fighting and come home" (436).

That Inman doesn't come home again isn't the point. What is essential is the journey and the transformation, both his and Ada's. At *Cold Mountain*'s onset, Ada is crippled by helplessness, Inman by hardness. They are lacking in ways they deem important. Throughout, they struggle to come to terms with themselves, their pasts, their current tasks, their faith in the future. And they triumph. By the book's end, Ada becomes autonomous and Inman softens. Both feel finally complete. Inman dies, redeemed, knowing that he cannot shoot a boy who "looked as if his first shave lay still ahead of him" (442), leaving Ada to fulfill their vow and "go forward from there into whatever new world the war left behind" (437).

Katie's Reflection:

This essay was assigned early in November, during the week of the Leonid meteor shower — unfortunate timing. I'd adopted a schedule of afternoon naps in order to leave the prime post-midnight hours open for cosmic viewing, all of which allowed precious little time to write.

That the shower rarely topped a slow trickle hardly mattered. I justified the outings as a sort of "field research" for my essay, which led to the inclusion of the crow motif, the images of trees and rivers, and the bits about the constellations. And I decided under the stars to keep the focus on Ada's and Inman's personal struggles and their growth, a theme bigger than the war, and as timeless as Orion.

Moby Dick and Jaws

Gina Spigarelli

Wayzata High School, grade 11

Often writers use external influences in their words to provoke a reaction from their characters. In doing so they reveal to us the personalities of these characters by allowing us to contemplate the reactions of each individual character to each outside influence. This technique is particularly evident in the two novels Moby Dick by Herman Melville and Jaws by Peter Benchley. The similarity between these two lies in the external influences: the ocean and the whale in Moby Dick and the ocean and the shark in Jaws. The reactions of the two main characters to these influences reveal their personalities and ultimately their fates in the books.

In *Moby Dick* the two main characters are Ishmael and Ahab. Ahab is the captain of the *Pequod* and has lost his leg to the great white whale, Moby Dick. As a sailor Ahab views the ocean and all of its dangers as forces to be reckoned with and simply challenges to overcome. This reaction to the ocean presents us with the reality that Ahab is an adventurous character who is not easily intimidated by forces other than his own will power. Ishmael, on the other hand, is simply a first time sailor aboard the *Pequod*; while he does not particularly fear the water, he is a much more conservative and safety-conscious character who does not laugh in the face of danger as his captain tends to do. When it comes to the whale itself, Ahab wants revenge. So much so, in fact, that he will lose sight of everything else to get it. He becomes oblivious to the dangers that are reiterated to him by several people in the book and figures his personal agenda is the most important thing. It is this narrow-mindedness, in fact, that leads to his death in the end. His refusal to focus on anything else causes fatal results. Ishmael, on the contrary, does indeed realize the

danger of Moby Dick. He views Ahab's mission on a much broader scale and sees the overall picture of what may happen. Although he is a novice at sea, it is his conservative nature that is the key to saving his life.

In the story of *Jaws* the two lead roles include Quint, a fisherman whose specialty is sharks, and Brody, the chief of police in a city whose beach is being attacked by a Great White shark. Quint, much like Ahab, is the rough and tough sailor who figures himself invincible and decides to hunt the shark for money. Here, once again, the outside influence of the shark and the way that he reacts to simply gain money show us that Quint is both harsh and ruthless. He, like Ahab, becomes so involved with personal interest and revenge on the shark that he goes to extreme measures to make sure he is the one to kill it. In the story, Quint has a very personal hatred for the shark as he was on the *USS Indianapolis*, which sank and whose sailors became a midnight feeding for the local sharks. After surviving this horrid experience Quint vows to kill as many man-eating sharks as he possibly can. Chief Brody is very similar to the Ishmael character. He is placed in a situation unknown to him and put in very serious danger by his captain. Chief Brody actually fears the ocean, which shows us his conservative and less than adventurous lifestyle and personality. The fate of these two characters is identical to that of the characters in *Moby Dick*. Those who become so one-tracked and closed-minded lose their lives, while the open-minded characters who can adjust to situations presented to them manage to overcome the odds and live.

Overall, the idea of using external influences to portray internal traits and attitudes of characters is a very effective one. It is for this reason that Melville and Benchley as well as numerous other authors use this technique to further the development of their characters. It is also this that keeps us, the readers, intrigued enough to read and re-read these books.

A Tale of Two Cities

Mark Hanson

Eastview High School, Eagan, grade 11

There are many themes that present themselves throughout the reading of Dickens' classic A Tale of Two Cities. Of these themes, there is one which presents itself as the most interesting and inspiring of them all. This theme is that within every human being exists the potential for heroism, no matter how feeble, faint, or weak a person may seem. It could be said then, that A Tale of Two Cities not only tells a tale of London and Paris, but it also tells the tale of weakness and strength, those two cities existing within every human mind, and how when duty calls, every person has the ability to do the extraordinary. This theme instills a great feeling of hope and admiration in the reader, which can only be described as wonderful. To see ordinary people do extraordinary things moves the soul and creates a very powerful message in Dickens' tale. This amazing ability is the most evident in the characters of Dr. Manette and Sydney Carton.

From the beginning of the novel, Dr. Manette is shown to be an emotional wreck, with no ability to exist in the real world. Manette's long imprisonment had left him unable to function without the feeling of security that he had felt within the confines of the Bastille. This aspect of Manette's personality presents itself when Lucie and Mr. Lorry first find Dr. Manette. As the two, along with Mr. Defarge, enter Dr. Manette's confines within Defarge's home, a deliberate, yet necessary step of locking the door behind themselves is taken simply so Dr. Manette will not become frightened (46). Dr. Manette's unsettling need for this action to be taken is evidence of his unstable and weak mind. Dr. Manette's struggle to keep some semblance of order within his chaotic life manifests itself in the nervous and purposeless habit of making shoes. When Lucie and

Lorry first meet Dr. Manette in the previously mentioned locale, Manette is making shoes. When Lucie is leaving on her honeymoon, Manette again is making shoes. And when all hope is seemingly lost for saving Darnay, Manette is making shoes (47-55, 192-198, 335). All of this behavior seems to suggest a person who cannot deal with any problem, or tackle any task of merit. However, this assumption is proved incorrect when Dr. Manette must be the strongest for his daughter and his family.

After the imprisonment of Charles Darnay, the suspected behavior of Dr. Manette would be, and this seems to be a given, making shoes. Manette, however, proves that it is in the toughest of times that people become their strongest. Darnay's imprisonment had left the family feeling helpless, and no one knew what to do; there seemed to be no way to get Darnay out of prison. Dr. Manette, on the other hand, had become a new person. His efforts throughout the fifteen or so months of Darnay's imprisonment had gotten Darnay out of prison. Dickens stated that Manette "took lead and direction, and required [the family] as the weak, to trust him as the strong" (269, 284). These actions of heroism in saving Darnay's life show how when Dr. Manette was needed most, he was able to summon a power never possessed in himself before to accomplish the seemingly impossible. Although Manette did relapse after he was unable to save Darnay's life a second time, he only relapsed when he knew he could do no more, and it was through his strength that the others (Mr. Lorry and Sydney Carton) acquired the inspiration to continue their efforts (335). In assessing Dr. Manette's character, then, it is seen that he perfectly models Dickens' prevailing theme of strength (specifically in the weak) in hard times. Upon reading this, the reader is left to ponder whether they would have the strength to pull through in difficult times, and Manette's character gives the reader a behavior to model as their own in difficult times.

As Dr. Manette showed his strength in the hardest of times, Sydney Carton would go a level beyond Manette's

and give his life simply so another person could enjoy theirs. Carton's weaknesses are obvious, and they create a person just as feeble as Dr. Manette (not necessarily in physical ability, but emotion ability). Carton's habit of getting drunk is described in the scenes shortly following the trial of Darnay for treason, where it is written that he can sometimes be seen just stumbling around in the daytime with little care for where he goes. This lack of direction in life shows a lost man searching for meaning, and a man who has lost his ability to make something of his life. Carton himself knows these faults, describing himself in the scene where he confesses his love for Lucie as a "self-flung away, wasted, drunken, poor creature of misuse" (154). It is in this description that the reader finds out the extent to which Carton's life is in turmoil. Carton simply can't reveal his inner-self to anyone except Lucie, and when he does confide to Lucie, he merely comes off as a desperate man looking for some reason to exist. Carton's need for a reason to exist, and the need to make something of his short life suggest a pathetic man, however, it is in those seemingly futile pursuits that Carton truly performs the heroic.

In the time of most difficulty for the Evrémonde family, Sydney Carton proves his ability to find the strength to do the incredible. As seen before, Carton had previously been seen as merely a drunk without a purpose, but quite the contrary, Carton made more of his life than many could ever aspire to. As Darnay awaited his impending execution, Carton entered his cell. At first his purpose seemed vague, but it soon became obvious that he intended to take Darnay's spot in the execution, doing so through exchanging clothes. Once Darnay and Carton had exchanged all their clothes, Carton tells Darnay to leave, knowing that he would soon be dead (342-346). Why would Carton do such a thing? After reading the previous paragraph, the answer should become obvious. Carton wanted to do something valiant for once in his life, and wanted Lucie to live the happy and full life that he had always dreamed could be with him. This uncommon bravery by a man who was seemingly just a drunk, illustrates Dickens' theme of uncommon bravery in common people perfectly, doing one of the most heroic things imaginable. Carton knew that his calling was no better served than in enhancing another's life, and he knew that it was his duty to follow this calling.

Carton's bravery was still unfinished, however, because as he went to the guillotine, he subtly pulled off an

other act of heroism. Once Carton entered a cart traveling to his life's final destination, the guillotine, he met a scared and nervous young girl in need of reassurance. Stepping out of character once again, Carton talks with the young woman and comforts her to the end, allowing her to hold his hand throughout (347, 366). This does not sound like the behavior of the previously mentioned character, and indeed, it is not. This is a character who has become something better in the face of adversity, a weakling who was made great because duty called on him to be. No other person more perfectly shows the written-of theme than Sydney Carton, because his valor is so distinct, and it came from someone so lacking in it earlier in life.

In today's society, there are few things as cherished and respected as a noble death. In assessing Carton's actions, it is quite fair to say that his death was more than simply noble; it was heroic. In a person with obvious character flaws, a hero emerged whose actions were probably the most significant in the entire novel. The message that this sends to the reader is inspirational beyond any other message in *A Tale of Two Cities*. The message is quite plain: within even the most flawed of beings exists the power for nobility and heroism. Readers can relate to Carton's situation because they have their own flaws; Carton is a reflection of the audience reading the novel. Since Carton was able to summon superhuman abilities to accomplish such a heroic action, there is no reason to think that the audience will not be able to do the same. Thus, coming from Sydney Carton, Dickens' message of heroism in the smallest of beings is magnified and more meaningful. Carton's actions are actions that almost all of society wishes could be their own.

Heroism in the smallest of people is a theme that is infused throughout *A Tale of Two Cities*, and it is no more prevalent than in the characters of Dr. Manette and Sydney Carton. Through the actions of these two characters, the reader gains a sense that although people may appear to be meager, within everyone is a potential for greatness that rises to whatever occasion necessary. This theme is inspiring to all, and it gives everyone the hope that when the greatest challenge of their life comes, they will be able to meet it in the same heroic manner that these two characters did.

Minnesota State Graduation Standards: Arts Interpretation of Literature

Patty Strandquist

Eastview High School, Eagan

Specific Statements from the Standard:

What students should know:

2. Understand the elements and structure of the art form and how it is used to create meaning
3. Know artistic intent and the historical, cultural, and social background of selected artworks

What students should do:

2. Describe how particular effects are produced by the artist's use of the elements of the art form
3. Communicate an informed interpretation using the vocabulary of the art form

Overview: In this performance package, you will do a series of tasks that will help you answer two questions: What is story? What is the value of story? In the tasks of this package you will demonstrate your ability to interpret literature, analyze literature, find connections with other works of art and non-fiction, and develop definitions of fiction and non-fiction.

Product:

A portfolio of short papers about one work of fiction.

Task Description:

The Paper (Portfolio) of Many Parts

You will create a portfolio of short papers for the work chosen for literary analysis.

The papers in this portfolio will include:

Required Tasks:

- A. Initial Response Essay: Write a brief paper explaining your general reaction to, impressions of, and questions about the work.

- B. Plot Diagram, Chronology, or Summary: Develop a plot diagram, brief chronology, or a brief summary of the work.

- C. Choose one of the following theme options:

Option #1: Theme Exploration

1. Write a list identifying three themes for the work. You should chose themes that illuminate or extend our understanding of the human condition.

2. In a paragraph packed with specific details/examples from the work, explore one of the themes from your Theme List. You might choose a theme on the basis of your own or someone else's interests. However, be sure you consider your ability to support the theme, using specifics from the text.

Option #2: Critical paper: Read a critical essay on the work. Write a short paper discussing the essays and demonstrating how they enrich your understanding of the work. Be sure to include specific citations from the essay as well as specific citations from the work of literature to support your discussion.

Option #3: Short Analysis Paper: Write a short paper that explores in detail at least two of the formal elements of fiction and that relates these elements to the work's theme. Among the elements you may consider are the uses of symbolism, figurative language, allusion, setting, characterization, dialogue, narrative structure, and repeated elements. Be sure to provide sufficient detail and examples from the text to support your analysis.

Additional Responses:

Choose two of the following to include in your portfolio:

- A. Biographical Sketch: Research the author and write one to two paragraphs about him/her. Be sure to include specific details that shed light on the work or raise questions about the work.

- B. Context Sketch: Research the time period in which the work was written. Among the areas you might explore are politics, economics, popular culture, literature, art (performing and visual), science, religion, and technology. Write one or two paragraphs providing insight about the context of the work.

- C. Interview: Interview someone who has read the literary work. Include questions about his/her interpretation of the work. Write a brief account of the interview and include several direct quotes.

- D. Commentary: Write a commentary on the work. It must include your final response to the work and explore any ambiguities, inconsistencies, or questions that still remain for you.

- E. Responding with a Performance: You will develop two contrasting and plausible interpretations of a single work of literature. For example, "My Papa's Waltz" (Theodore Roethke) can be read as a close moment with a father who is gruff and lacks social skills; it can also be read as a piece that expresses uneasiness, distrust, and fear of impending violence, a poem where there is tension between the son's love for his father and his fear of him. Another example might be the character of Daisy in *The Great Gatsby* (Fitzgerald), who could be seen either as an innocent victim or as a manipulator who targets people for destruction. Having developed these contrasting and plausible interpretations, you will present them to the class in two oral readings of the work. If you chose a longer work, you may select appropriate passages to read instead of reading the entire text.

In the oral interpretation, you may establish contrast in several ways. One is by choosing contrasting passages from the same text. Another is to choose the same passage (or the entire text, if it is a short poem) and provide contrasting vocal tone (sarcasm, excitement, irony, anger, sadness), body language (facial expression, gestures, posture) and emphasis (stress, rhythm, volume).

- F. Visual Response: Choose a passage, scene, or book division to illustrate. Consider themes, setting, character, and setting description as you create your illustration. Write a short piece explaining your choices and approach to the illustration.

- G. Other: Create a proposal for an additional response to the text. Submit this to your instructor for prior approval to include in the portfolio.

Checklist for Portfolio

Student Check

Required Tasks:

Initial Response Essay

Essay is relevant to text.

Plot Diagram, Chronology, or Summary

Plot diagram, chronology, or summary is accurate and complete.

One of the following was completed:

Theme Exploration

List of three themes is clearly stated, plausible, and significant.

Exploration of theme is supported by citations from the work.

Exploration of theme is logical and coherent.

Critical Paper

Essay details the views of the critic.

Essay underscores how the critical works enrich the understanding
of the literary piece studied.

Short Analysis Paper

Statement of theme is sufficiently specific.

Explanation of the theme's importance is tenable (can be defended).

Description of the element is clear and accurate.

Each element is supported with specifics from the text.

Choice Tasks (Two of the following were completed):

Biographical Sketch

Specific details about author's life are included.

Details reflect the work or raise questions about the work.

Context Sketch

Research reflects the time period of the piece.

Discussion provides insight on the issues of the period.

Interview

Complete list of interview questions included.

Account of interview responses included.

Complete summary of interview including several quotes.

Commentary

Complete commentary of work, including questions or inconsistencies.

Responding with a Performance

Two interpretations presented.

Both interpretations are plausible.

Presentation clarified the two interpretations.

Visual Response

Illustration accurately reflects the passage selected.

Explanation clarified the choices and intention of the illustration.

Teacher Check

NCTE Writing Achievement Awards

JeanMarie Z. Burtness

Minnesota Coordinator

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) Achievement Awards in Writing recognizes excellence in two types of writing produced by high school juniors. Students are nominated by English teachers from their own high schools in the late fall of their junior year. Individual high schools may nominate from one to six students depending upon the school's enrollment. Some English departments use the previous year's impromptu topics in a "write-off" contest to assist in the nomination process.

The application forms are available from NCTE in October; previously participating high schools are automatically sent the forms. In April the nominated students have two hours to write on one of two impromptu nonfiction topics they also submit up to ten pages of their best revised and typed writing which may be a combination of fictional prose, poetry, dramatic scripts, personal narratives, or literary analysis papers.

These papers are evaluated and ranked by teams of judges in each state, usually a college writing professor and a high school composition teacher. The highest ranking papers are sent to the National Council of Teachers of English for recognition. The results are announced in the fall of the students' senior year by NCTE. The top ranked writers are listed in a booklet entitled "High School Seniors Recommended for College Scholarships" which each commended student receives. The number of students per state is based on the number of legislative districts; Minnesota may select up to 16 students if their combined rankings on the two types of writing meet the judging criteria.

Please contact the National Council of Teachers of English, Achievement Awards in Writing, 1111 W. Kenyon Road, Urbana, Illinois 61801 or go to the NCTE website www.ncte.org to receive more information.

These were the two topics for the Spring 2000 impromptu essays:

Topic A—Violence in the Schools

With the continued concern about school violence in America during the past years, educators, parents, and students themselves are left in a quandary. As a result, many districts have considered and taken steps toward increased school safety.

Imagine that you have been invited to be a member of a panel of educators, students, and community leaders to address the problem of school safety. Each panel member has been asked to discuss his or her views on safe schools. Write a letter to the group in which you explain your suggestions for making schools safer.

Topic B—Media Influence

During the past few years, there has been growing interest in the media exposure young people receive. Many believe that teen behavior is shaped by what young people see on television, videos, or in the movies. Some argue that teens model their behavior, dress, or speech after media figures and movie stars.

As a roving reporter for your community newspaper, write an opinion column in which you explore your observations on whether the media has a positive or negative effect on young people.

Topic A

Mike Ethier*Armstrong High School, grade 11*

Dear Panel,

There have been many other "solutions" from politicians and leaders to the "problems" they feel exist in schools today. Many of these people have no children, or send their children to private schools to escape the "dangers" of public school. In reality, these people have little or no idea of what goes on every day in high school, and what they see on the news only reinforces their misguided ideas. Their suggested solutions include: distributing clear backpacks to keep students from concealing weapons; banning hats, jackets, scarves, bandannas, or even the wearing of similar clothing among groups, as it may signify gang alliance; and the addition of metal detectors and cameras, random drug testing, and even random searching of students.

While I am more liberal than most and don't take offense to these as invasions of privacy (even though that is what they are), I just don't feel they are realistic and would solve any problems. Schools need to realize that silly, unenforceable, or overbearing rules only breed mistrust and discontent among students, making things worse. If suggested rules and changes to do not serve a clear and useful purpose, they should not happen. Making schools a better place through means such as increased funding for teachers, equipment and activities should be a politician's priority, as having a school students take pride in will in turn make the school a safer place.

As a member of a panel on school violence, you need to realize that you are merely addressing the symptoms of a deeper social problem. Kids don't just get up one morning and say, "Ah, what the hell, I think I'll blow up the school today." There are many reasons why kids are driven to kill other classmates, and unfortunately, most are beyond the reach of the school. I have a wide variety of friends, ranging from straight A nerds, to hard drinking jocks, to failing druggies. And in all their cases, their attitudes seem to be a direct response to their relationship

with their parents. One old friend comes to mind, as he as gone through a drastic change. When I first met him, he was a happy, B-average student, but he had just transferred to the district and had few friends. At that time his mom and dad were going through a divorce, and he was desperate for anyone he could grab on to. He got in with the wrong crowd, and now he smokes too much pot, drinks too much beer, and has sex with too many girls. He is headed down the wrong road, and it all goes back to the collapse of his family. While he may not be a threat to cause violence at school, it is kids like him, kids who slip through the cracks, that do tend toward violence. And they need our help.

So in reality, there are few easy solutions to this problem. And it is a problem that is much deeper than it looks on the surface. It has roots in all the social problems of our time, and makes us face issues that we may not want to face. Many of our leaders have been guilty of mistakes in the past (or when it comes to The Leader, the mistakes have happened in office) and consequently, they have a hard time facing these challenges. It's easy to clamor for cameras and metal detectors, clear backpacks and drug tests. These may help, but they do not solve the problem. These solutions just push the deeper issues aside, making them flare up again down the road. The most important thing you can do to prevent school violence is to follow the advice of an old adage, "When you are on your deathbed, the amount you had in your savings account won't matter. What will matter is that you made a difference in the life of a child."

Panel members, go home, and take a closer look at your own kids. Hug them. Kiss them. Make them know they are loved and cared for. This may seem an odd way to reduce school violence, but if everyone would do that, the world would be a better place.

Topic A

Aaron Kashtan*St. Louis Park High School, grade 11*

To Whom It May Concern:

A year ago today, we bore witness to the most notorious episode of school violence in American history. Although they were hardly the first such incident, the shootings at Columbine High in Littleton, Colorado, had by far the most staggering effect on the nation's consciousness. Not only did this tragedy shock the nation, it also brought the issue of school safety to the forefront of American public discourse. Much blame was laid and many remedies proposed, but obviously, there was no easy resolution to what many saw as a national crisis. The first anniversary of Columbine is thus a particularly appropriate time to address the issue that grew out of its aftermath, and to make recommendations for school safety in the future. But before doing so, we should analyze the background of the tragedy itself and its effect on America's students.

To many students like myself, the most profoundly felt effect of the Columbine massacre was the backlash it produced against students everywhere. This tragedy produced a public drive to protect students from themselves, and to take drastic measures to ensure that no student would ever again have either the motive or the opportunity to commit such acts. In many cases, this lead to an outright crackdown on students' rights and civil liberties, both in school and out. Administrators preached a Big Brother-like mentality to students, declaring that each student had a duty to report any threats or even hints of violence made by fellow students. Censorship reigned, and worse, a drive for conformity: the ACLU is currently involved in the case of a high school student who was suspended from school under a post-Columbine policy banning "unusual hair colors." But this incident pales in comparison to the virtual police states some schools have become. All over the country, metal detectors and closed-campus policies proliferate and security staffs grow in size.

Certain schools now greatly resemble prisons, except that prisons have better food.

This "post-Columbine hysteria" came not only from administrators but from students, parents, and the media as well. Due to misconceptions that the killer, Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold, had belonged to a "Trenchcoat Mafia," "goth" students around the country found themselves persecuted for their lifestyles and their tastes in music and clothes. Marilyn Manson, self-proclaimed "Antichrist Superstar," quickly became a scapegoat. This reaction also occurred in reverse. The nation's collective heartstrings were tugged by the story of a student (misidentified as Cassie Bernall) who had been shot by Klebold and Harris after admitting that she believed in God. This student soon became a martyr and a symbol of religious faith in the face of imminent death. And of course, everything from media violence to heavy metal music to working mothers was blamed for pushing Klebold and Harris, and others like them to murder. Even the government got into the act of preventing another Columbine, as the U.S. House of Representatives passed an absurd bill to post the Ten Commandments on public school walls. The Columbine blame game went beyond school walls to cause public outcry and even hysteria.

In a way, the repression and hysteria that Columbine caused was almost worse than the tragedy itself. It is paramount that we avoid turning our schools into prisons, or infringing on the civil liberties students deserve as American citizens. Yet at the same time, the need to prevent a second coming of Columbine is self-evident. Our policy on school violence must take both these concerns into account, striking a balance between protection and repression. With this in mind, I recommend that we must, first, retain our faith in students; and, second, refrain from abridging their rights.

Impromptu Essay

To begin with, we must have faith in students. In the wake of Columbine, many students have been judged guilty until proven innocent. It is widely assumed that every high school student—or at least all at-risk students and the “goth” crowd—is a potential Dylan Klebold, while elementary students are seen a little Kip Kinkels. Every once in a while these assumptions are made to seem valid, most recently when a 6-year-old first-grader shot a classmate. But these cases are the exception, not the rule. The vast majority of America’s high school students are intelligent, caring young people, not violent, bloodthirsty sociopaths; and for every student who does shoot a classmate, there are literally millions who don’t. In fact, school shootings like Columbine receive so much publicity precisely because they are rare. Thus, the violent reaction to Columbine is an example of a practice nearly every student has learned to hate: punishing the whole group, including the “good” kids, for the crimes of only a few. Even worse than the actual post-Columbine repression, perhaps, is the loss of faith it implies. By repressing and punishing students through censorship, harsh security, and public backlash, we forget why they are there in the first place. Children and teenagers go to school not just so that adults can keep an eye on them, but so they can learn the skills necessary for good citizenship and adult life. In order for them to do so, they must be given the respect they deserve.

We must, of course, be vigilant against future killings; even one killer in a million students is one too many. But in accordance with our faith in students, our efforts to prevent school violence should come from students themselves. This current conference, taking input from students as well as parents and administrators, is a definite step in the right direction. Or again, a group in my school recently staged a “Peace Week” in which they surveyed students on their own ideas of promoting peace in schools and on how violence had affected them personally. Although the effect of this was uncertain, it did manage to gather many diverse student views on the issue of school safety, and attempted to involve students in the

issue. With more support from administrators and students themselves, such a response would be much more effective than repression imposed from above. These are the kind of efforts we should promote; because in the last analysis, the people most affected by school violence are students themselves. Schools exist for the express purpose of educating students and keeping them safe, and it is students who are most directly affected both by school violence and by efforts for the prevention thereof. Thus, it is fitting that students should have a role in shaping our policy to prevent school violence.

The best response to the widespread problem of school violence is neither repression nor loss of faith in students. Rather, we should treat students as what they are: the future of a free society. We must remember their humanity and their intrinsic value and act accordingly. Avoiding the same hysteria that characterized the post-Columbine era, we should allow students to shape our response to school violence and ensure that they get the faith and respect that they, in the great majority, have earned. With such a policy we will honor the memory of the victims of Columbine by acknowledging that, on the anniversary of their deaths, the Columbine tragedy has finally taught us the right lesson.

Impromptu Essay

Topic B

Bitta Fynskov

Rochester John Marshall High School, grade 11

In a society where almost every family has a television and some have several, the media has a great ability to shape opinions. Teens, who have a high level of exposure to television and movies, are in line to be the group that is most affected. Separate from their parents for the first time, they respond to the media’s messages not only because of how often they receive these messages, but also because they are just beginning to form opinions of their own. The media influences today’s youth through the content of TV, movies, and newspapers, and through the frequency of these ideas.

First, media shows its influence in the new type of program becoming popular on TV right now: the adult cartoon. Usually very funny, these shows seem harmless. Unfortunately, this is because the message sent is harder to see in these beguiling programs and therefore is harder to refute. *King of the Hill*, *The Simpsons*, and *South Park* are favorites of teens across the nation. These shows appear to be a little crude, but for the most part, parents deem them appropriate. However, the bad language is only the most obvious reason to be concerned. The dysfunctional families portrayed in these cartoons are hardly the laughing matter that the authors make them out to be. The media makes poor relationships look normal to teens. When there is no one to teach otherwise, the cartoons leave teens strangely complacent about how they treat the other members of their families.

Not only does TV confuse teens about relationships, so do movies. Almost all of the movies recently produced have one thing in common: there is a romance. Not all start out as romantic films, but in many, two people who begin the movie as good friends end it by sleeping together. In many high schools, abstinence is taught during one class of one semester. For the rest of the four years, the same teens who learned that abstinence is the only way to “practice safe sex” watch characters sleep around in movies and on television with no consequences. Often, sex in movies is purely recreational,

shown as a common occurrence between two good friends. This devalues friendship and ultimately romance as well. Because of the constant exposure to sex on TV and in movies, teens often feel uncertain about which theory is correct: that of their teachers, parents, and religion, or that of the society that lives in a box—the one that is ready to entertain at the flick of a switch.

Finally, relationships at schools are jeopardized as well. Columbine High School, when traumatized by student gunmen on April 20, 1999, was not allowed to be a lesson, was not allowed to have the opportunity to heal by helping other schools avoid the same situation. Instead, due to extreme amounts of attention by media, the school had to deal with a second (and far worse) situation. Columbine has become a model, a pattern for other misguided youth to follow. This hurt must be one that is hardest for the victims of that tragedy to bear. If the media had broadcast the news for only one week, one month, instead of one year, maybe these other teens would have been less likely to copycat. This vicious cycle has occurred only because the media refused to believe that it was a part of the problem, that it must be more responsible about its coverage.

The media, although sometimes beneficial, damages our society by its excess. While perhaps not everyone who watches TV, movies, or reads the newspaper will be affected by this abuse of power, many will and are. It is hard enough for teens to become adults without the extra strain of determining which information is true, relevant, and applicable and which information should be deemed irresponsible and unnecessary. The media needs to realize its role in the shaping of our country and our youth and use it wisely. We want a media that leads with discretion.

Topic B

Joshua Helmin

Hopkins High School, grade 11

Our Killer Media

Josh Helmin, Senior Editorial Staff Writer

April 11, 2000

Jonathan sat in a corner by himself. He was playing with a set of Jenga building blocks, fashioning a structure which resembled the Eiffel Tower. Suddenly another little boy rushed up to Jonathan's miniature Eiffel Tower and smashed the tower. Jonathan's quiet exterior disappeared as his face reddened. Jonathan stood up, kicked the boy in the face with a surprisingly smooth karate move, and proceeded to use his little fingers as mock guns to "shoot" the terrified young boy who had destroyed Jonathan's building block creation. I stood shocked, a teenage volunteer at this seemingly peaceful underprivileged daycare center, and quickly stopped the situation. I scooped Jonathan up and carried him outside.

"Why did you do that?" I questioned Jonathan patiently when we got outside the daycare center.

"He messed my thing up," Jonathan said defiantly, refusing to make eye contact with me.

"Jonathan, how old are you?"

"I'm seven," Jonathan declared with childish pride.

"Jonathan, you hurt that little boy a lot."

"He's gonna be just fine," Jonathan muttered, brushing off any guilt.

"Why did you kick him and then pretend to shoot him?" I asked patiently.

"I wanted him dead."

"You wanted him dead?"

"That's what the guy did in the *Basketball Diaries*. And Neo kicked that black guy like that in *The Matrix*."

Suddenly what happened in that daycare center became much clearer. Jonathan had simply imitated what he had seen done in movies. I had seen both movies Jonathan was referencing, and shuddered to think that this little seven-year-old boy had seen both of those violent, dark, rated 'R' movies.

The Basketball Diaries, one of the movies Jonathan said he was imitating, features a scene in which Leonardo DiCaprio enters his school wearing a long black trench coat, toting an enormous gun. DiCaprio angrily storms into a classroom, the soundtrack blasting angry heavy metal music, and shoots his classmates and his teacher. After killing his teachers and classmates in cold blood, DiCaprio laughs and feels relief.

The Matrix was a movie filled with cyber crime, guns, and karate moves. Jonathan later told me that he had enrolled in karate classes after seeing *Matrix* because he "wanted to be just like Neo," the lead character in *Matrix* played by Keanu Reeves. Jonathan had replicated one of the kicks Reeves used in the film almost perfectly to give the little boy who ruined his building block structure a bloody nose.

Children throughout the country are doing the same thing Jonathan did. They see television shows like *The Power Rangers* or any of the *Batman*, *Spiderman*, or *Superman* television programs. Many youngsters, just like Jonathan, have parents who permit their children to see violent, gory, rated 'R' movies which have ample amounts of sex and violence.

The worst part is that children cannot separate reality from fantasy. Jonathan didn't understand that if he killed the little boy who messed up his building blocks, that little boy would never get up again. Jonathan didn't understand that dead means never walking, talking, or playing again. Jonathan also didn't understand how much pain his swift kicks caused. Children in general see big, burly actors get punched, kicked, and even shot in television and movies, and then the actors stand up again to keep on fighting through stab wounds, bullet holes, blood, and bruises. Children have no realization about the pain and damage

that those stab wounds, bullets, and bruises cause. They assume that, like little characters on *Looney Toons*, that people can be hit and shot and beat and then come back in the next scene to keep on playing.

Girls are affected much differently by media than boys. Boys tend to be far more interested in violence and cartoon superheroes. Girls tend to be far less interested in television shows like *Power Rangers* and *Batman* and instead usually prefer life melodramas like *Dawson's Creek*, *Party of Five*, or *Popular*. These television shows seem to teach girls how they should act and how they should look. *Popular*, a newer addition to the WB network, features a lead female character who is a fifteen-year-old girl dealing with high school life. The character, however, is played by an actress who is twenty-two years old. Her body has matured completely and in interviews with *Seventeen* magazine the actress discusses how her trainer and her nutritionist keep her fit and trim for the show. Average teen girls watching *Popular* can't compete with a twenty-two year old's body and can't achieve a body which has been molded through years of work with a professional physical fitness trainer and registered dietitian.

Female sex symbols in America have changed drastically, and it's no wonder that American girls have an extremely high incidence of bulimia and anorexia. Marilyn Monroe, one of the most famous sex symbols of all time, wore a size 14 dress when she was America's favorite beauty in the 1950s. Now, some fifty years later, we have stars like Calista Flockhart who starts in *Ally McBeal*, wearing a size zero dress. We also have Teri Hatcher, former star of *Lois and Clark*, and *The Practice*'s Lara Flynn Boyle who wear size one dresses. The height and weight proportions of some of Hollywood's biggest stars are extremely similar to the emaciated bodies of Holocaust survivors from the 1940s. Our young girls are presented with beautiful, successful, extremely thin actresses who many times serve as role models. It's no wonder that eating disorders are commonplace among American high school girls.

Comments by anybody that media doesn't actually affect our children are absurd. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our boys see violence and hate and our girls see extremely thin actresses who have sex with other television characters to get ahead in life. Children naturally have a tendency to reenact what they consistently view. If we continue to allow our children to see

these television shows and movies filled with skinny models, sex, and extreme violence, we are going to have a nation with more incidents like the Columbine High School shoot-out, and more and more deaths attributed to self-destructive eating disorders.

The choice is yours next time you let your daughter pick up an issue of *Elle* or *Seventeen*, and the choice is yours next time your child wants to see *The Basketball Diaries*, *The Matrix*, *Texas Chain Saw Massacre*. You hold the future of a nation in your hands because, as Aristotle pointed out thousands of years ago, we become what we consistently see and do. Unless we want a nation filled with violent, angry boys and extremely thin, passive girls, we must stop the problem where it starts: our killer media.

Josh's Reflection:

When I received the prompt for the essay, I decided I wanted to create something original and thought-provoking. Instead of writing a normal, standard essay, I decided to use a bit of creativity. I imagined writing a newspaper article from the point of view of a seasoned, opinionated journalist. With that mindset, I wrote a piece which I felt proud of, believing it was original, creative, and fresh — something I imagined to be much appreciated in an essay contest.

NCTE Scoring Guide

Content

Strengths:
Independence of thought
Writer's engagement with topic
Fresh insights

Weaknesses:
Preponderance of obvious statements
Writer uninvolved with topic
Subject treated perfunctorily

Purpose/Audience/Tone

Strengths:
Focus and intent clear and consistent
Language and tone appropriate to purpose and audience

Weaknesses:
Purpose unclear or unrealized

Words: Choice and Arrangement

Strengths:
Concern for expressiveness as well as clear communication
Apt choice of words
Readable, unambiguous sentences

Weaknesses:
Limited vocabulary or misuse of words
Indulgence in cliches
Awkward or faulty sentences

Organization and Development

Strengths:
Logical progression, easy to follow
Adequate support and elaboration
Sense of completeness and closure
Meaningful paragraphing

Weaknesses:
Little sense of direction or organizational pattern
Few particulars or examples offered as support
Fragmentary thoughts, lacking cohesion
Intent of paragraphing unclear

Style

Strengths:
Fluent, readable prose
Sentence structure treated flexibly
Appropriate use of metaphor, analogy, parallelism, and similar rhetorical devices
Occasional willingness to be daring
in thought or word; signs of inventiveness

Weaknesses:
Prose either effusive or cramped
Unvaried sentence structure
General absence of rhetorical devices
Tendency to play safe with words & ideas

Applicable to Fiction, Drama, and Poetry

Strengths:
Keen observation and reflection
Imaginative insight
Sensitivity to the nuances of words
Control of formal elements: point of view, chronology, metrics, etc.
Effective use of figurative language

Weaknesses:
Absence of meaningful detail
Unimaginativeness
Use of hackneyed words and phrases
Failure to accomplish desired effect

The judges and state coordinators rate each piece of writing on a six-point scale, with 6 as the highest rating and 1 as the lowest.
The written selections are judged in terms of their total effect using these general guidelines:

- 6 Potential in writing fully developed for the grade level, with distinguishing characteristics that give the writing an identity
- 5 Potential realized, showing competence with language and control in the development of the topic
- 4 Potential evident, but unevenness suggests that the writer is not yet in full command of the composing process
- 3 Potential partially indicated, but limited by shortcomings that call undue attention to themselves
- 2 Potential obscured by major flaws in the thought and development of the writing
- 1 Potential in writing undeveloped

NCTE Writing Awards - 2000

Writing Achievement Awards

Andrew Browers, Cloquet Senior High
Sponsoring Teacher: Daniel Naslund

Mike Ethier, Armstrong High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Sharon Eddleston

Elizabeth Fynskov, John Marshall HS, Rochester
Sponsoring Teacher: Mary Place

Samsher Gill, Edina High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Martha Leistikow

Breanne Goodell, Champlin Park High School
Sponsoring Teacher: JeanMarie Burtness

Danielle Hagen, Edina High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Martha Leistikow

Mark Hanson, Eastview High School, Eagan
Sponsoring Teacher: Patty Strandquist

Joshua Helmin, Hopkins High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Myrna Klobuchar

Aaron Kashtan, St. Louis Park High School
Sponsoring Teacher: David Ring

Anna Kegler, Eagan High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Robert Strandquist

Erin Lindgren, Eagan High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Robert Strandquist

Jaidyn Martin, Champlin Park High School
Sponsoring Teacher: JeanMarie Burtness

Julianne Nelson, Minnetonka High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Barbara Van Pilsum

Melissa Ny, John Marshall HS, Rochester
Sponsoring Teacher: Mary Place

Sara Podensi, John Marshall HS, Rochester
Sponsoring Teacher: Mary Place

Kristin Ritter, Eagan High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Robert Strandquist

Promising Young Writers

Alex Andrews
Scott Highlands Middle School, Apple Valley
Sponsoring Teacher: Susan King

Allison Bond
Willow Creek MS, Rochester
Sponsoring Teacher: Karen Admussen

Phillip Carter
South View MS, Edina
Sponsoring Teacher: Michael Postma

Connie Cheng
Capitol Hill Magnet School, St. Paul
Sponsoring Teacher: Alexandria Auck

Mikaela Hagen
Willow Creek MS, Rochester
Sponsoring Teacher: Karen Admussen

Amy Heinzerling
Valley View Middle School, Edina
Sponsoring Teacher: Galene Erickson

Marta Shaffer
South View Middle School, Edina
Sponsoring Teacher: Michael Postma

Sarah Waldrop
Wayzata West Junior High School
Sponsoring Teacher: Sarah Gohman

Choices

Allison Bond

Willow Creek Middle School, Rochester, grade 8

Robert Frost once said, "Of all I've learned about life, I can sum it up in three words: it goes on."

These wise words have helped me to get through times I didn't think I would survive; problematic times such a time of grief, including the loss of a friend's brother, or anxiety. Each fall as I prepare to return to school, I feel sadness, excitement, and uncertainty. All three are normal for the beginning of a school year, and as I lie in bed after the first day, I reflect on my feelings and discover that though I may, and will, have to face numerous challenges in the coming nine months, they can't affect me negatively unless I allow them to. With every conceivably negative situation, we have two options: to accept the problem as a learning experience that will change us positively, or to let it take its toll on our emotional and/or social well-being. To be sure, every cloud has a silver lining if we can only allow it to show itself.

Eighth grade can be a tumultuous year of insecurity and unhappiness. People are unsure of themselves and are trying to figure out who they really are; by ninth grade it's acceptable to be an individual, but in eighth grade, it's unthinkable.

When choosing friends and making other notable decisions, remember that in order to avoid all criticism, you must do nothing, say nothing, and therefore be nothing. Like many good propositions, this is easy to say but very, very difficult to act upon. Choose your friends for who they are, not how popular or 'cool' they are. The trick is to find friends that you enjoy being with and that accept you for who you truly are.

Remember, your friends influence you in many ways; select ones that won't affect you negatively. People that do things that you find beneath your morals or unacceptable are not worthy of your friendship.

I have searched near and far and 'tried out' many a friend only to find that my 'buddy' is only a social climber or something of that sort. Though it may seem unlikely at this point at your life, a loyal friend is better than a dozen 'cool' ones. I wouldn't trade some of my closest, dearest friends for anything on earth, including a higher rung on the social ladder.

Though it has been said an infinite number of times, the simplest motto that can help you get out of eighth grade with confidence and sanity (just kidding) intact is to be yourself. In a world where you can be anything, be yourself. Don't try to be somebody you're not; it doesn't work and sooner or later people will find out you're a fake. Through being myself, I have gained the respect of my classmates; they accept me for who I truly am.

Throughout eighth grade, you will come across definite boulders that block your way on the highway of life. Though these may be painful and difficult at times, later on they will seem to be merely pebbles. Like these speed bumps, eighth grade will prepare you in ways you may never realize until you reach high school, college... and beyond.

Promising Young Writers is NCTE's writing contest for 8th graders. Like the Writing Achievement Awards, students submit pieces of their best work and sit for a timed impromptu essay. Teams of two independent judges score the samples and the essays.

Information about the contest is available in November. There is a mid-January deadline. Details each year can be found at www.ncte.org.

In these examples of the impromptu essays of the *Promising Young Writers* contest of 2000, students were to give advice about 8th grade to in-coming 7th graders.

Reach

Mikaela Hagen

Willow Creek Middle School, Rochester, grade 8

Eighth grade is a time of complex, emotional fireworks; each person wanting the whole world to understand them, yet wanting the secrets of their soul for their own. These years of adolescence are years that complicate your fairy tale, adding characters that cannot be defeated by a mere kind word, challenges that you cannot face, and countless illusions to dissuade you. Each day is a mystery, do you search for what you want? Do you really know what you want? Your heart thrashes as your head tries to maintain calm. It is a game that you did not get the instruction manual to, but yet you must play along.

For me, eighth grade has been a year of profound opposites. From the highs of success to the pits of sorrow, I have seen much. The understanding of the harsh words and actions flung about has become almost a curse, disarming my ability to be truly angry. Anger is a safe feeling, you can pour your spirit into fire, your blood runs hot, and you can hate the world. But what comes after the anger, what is truly there, deep inside, is the most complicated, frightening thing in the world. The fear, worry, and insecurity that must be faced is an enemy that will never go away. If in this year of trial, regret, frustration and sorrow, you can find something to hold on to, then you will truly hold the key to life.

Every person, in their search for this "handhold" reaches out in the dark. Some find comfort in conformity, feeling secure and "the same," a haven for their floundering sense of self. Others, in a desperate cry to preserve who they are, rebel from the societal labels placed on them, defying any stereotypes possible. Still others react in anger, their feelings stirred into wrath. Countless analyses of teen behavior have been published, each lending their five cents of wisdom, trying to understand what they them-

selves struggled through. Even so, no one has all the answers, it is possible? The world moving at a blinding speed, there is no steady ground, it is all a great ocean of emotion, we must do our best to develop "sea legs."

Possibly the most simple and true instructions on life come from General Colin Powell: "Have a dream, remain kind, do not take council to your fears." I happened upon this quote one Monday morning when I could have sworn my world was an irreversible mess. I circled it in red pen, and throughout the day, I kept repeating it to myself. By the end of the day, I had begun to put it into action. Slowly those twelve words have made a profound difference in my life.

"Have a dream" You cannot live without a dream, an ultimate goal. Every day no matter the situation, there will always be a candle in your heart, to warm your shivering spirit. When you have your sight on a place so much higher than you are, you can begin building foundations to this castle in the sky. You must also accept the reality of your goals, you must take the steps. You cannot be afraid to stand up again, for it is only when you do not try that you truly die. The thought of some day reaching my dream, my utopia, has kept me from underrating what I can do, shying away from challenge, or even giving up. Reach for the stars.

"Remain kind" This part spoke to me, in a gentle but guilty way. I understood the kindness and compassion, but the sadness and betrayal I felt against those who had hurt me was so strong. I could not forgive, I wanted them to know how many nights I cried, how many hours I wasted trying to right a doomed situation. How, I asked myself could I remain kind when the whole world was cruel and cold? This was a colossal change for me. They were the only emotions that I felt keenly, the despair was becoming my obsession, everything was crashing. Ultimately, because I felt so terrible inside, I could not extend joy to my close friends, my family; it was too much of a responsibility to support others when I felt I could not support myself. Slowly, I have removed myself from this feeling, faking a smile, feigning confidence, until slowly,

these borrowed emotions became my own. Talking to someone I didn't like, creating a tolerance of the ways that everyone else's emotions were flowing out were each antidotes to my damaged spirit. This is a continuing struggle, and I could not do it without my journal which releases my negative energy, leaving me with the good. I try every day to surround myself with people that make me laugh, people that listen, people that care. And when there are days when there is nothing, I rely on love alone, of my God, and the family that will always be there for me.

"Don't take council to your fears" Everything in my world was a thought, a worry. Worries grew like parasites on my brain, sapping my happiness as I subconsciously convinced myself of terrible things. I lay awake at night my mind conjuring up thought after thought, each more terrible than the last. My greatest fears had become controlling forces in my life. Every action every word, had become a source of analysis. I worried day and night, nightmares filled my sleep. This has been my final battle. As the other two aspects of my life have turned around, this is acting more slowly. My writing releases worries, and each day I begin with sayings, self talk. This hurdle which I must clear is something I will always struggle with. It is a part of who I am, a tendency I cannot ever entirely stop. My writing has helped me release these horrors from my mind to a page. I rely on the love that surrounds me for comfort. In changing the other two parts of me, they have taken worries along with them. This is an everyday battle very real, very imminent, and I continue to fight.

Not every day will be a picnic, your good intentions, strategies, and hopes will not always go according to plan. The world around you which you cannot control will spin on. These trials have existed since the beginning of time, and will continue until the end. I give you now the power of these words, during this time, this rite of passage, keep them close to your heart, a single candle to urge you on. There will come tests and heartbreaks, but never, ever, give up.

The Substitute

As I sit in the classroom
 Listening to the giggles
 Of kids playing games
 Ignoring, the teacher trying
 To create order in disorder
 It isn't working
 He spends his voice
 Yelling be quiet.
 (how ironic)
 The kids know
 (somehow by instinct)
 That he won't enforce his command
 Separate discussions
 Springing up
 That have absolutely
 Nothing
 To do with the subject
 The teacher is a sub
 And he doesn't know
 The rhythm of teaching & learning
 He doesn't know
 How to control the class
 How to make them want to learn
 The kids yearn
 For their teacher to return
 So the natural order of things
 Can be restored
 Once again

Melody Rose

Crosswinds Middle School, St. Paul, grade 8

Dear Friend,

I hear that you are going to be starting eighth grade this year. Nervous at all? Well, you shouldn't be. I know you probably feel like you are about to enter a new world, where everything is not what you expect it to be, but the truth is, eighth grade is just about the same as seventh grade without the training wheels. However, if you are still not convinced that your experience will be enjoyable, the following tips may help you to take full advantage of eighth grade.

First of all, keep an open mind. Meet new people, try different things, and be creative in everything you do. By doing so, you will make your experience in eighth grade more interesting. Every new day holds thousands of opportunities, and with an open mind, you can be sure to discover every one of them.

Secondly, make sure you are organized. This may seem obvious, but you would be surprised how many students have trouble with it. I have seen many a locker in total disarray, papers and books strewn about in utter chaos as though a hurricane had taken place within. Some individuals will tell you organization is unnecessary, but do not listen to them, for they are the ones who cannot find anything they need to conduct their studies. Always write every assignment in your organizer. Keep your locker neat and orderly. You may even want to organize your notes and assignments into a system well suited to your own study routine. By staying organized, you will ensure yourself easy access to everything you need.

Another tip, and I am sure you have heard this a lot, is to always give your best work. I cannot emphasize how important it is to constantly be giving life your best effort. You may not think that what you are learning is relevant to your future. In some cases you may be right, but there are certain lessons to be learned in eighth grade, important not just toward becoming a good student, but becoming a good person as well. It is these lessons that will remain with you for the rest of your life, helping you to paint the picture of your future.

Perseverance is yet another quality that you will require to ensure an enjoyable, successful experience in eighth grade. It may seem difficult at times to complete your homework while maintaining a social life, in addition to pursuing any athletic or musical opportunities. You may think there simply aren't enough hours in the day to do everything you wish to do, but do not give up. It may not be easy, but you can follow each and every one of your dreams if you put your mind to it. Just remember that schoolwork comes first.

This brings me to my next tip, which involves sleep. You may find, as I have, that by staying up late every night you enable yourself to accomplish more every day. Sounds like a great idea, right? Don't do it! For the first few weeks it may appear to be helpful, but believe me, it will catch up with you fast. By getting a good night's rest every evening, you will be able to concentrate better in class and on the playing field. You will find that doing everything after a long night of rest will be much more satisfying than trying to accomplish more than you should on six hours of sleep.

Finally, and most importantly, try to have fun. Eighth grade does not have to be all work and no play. Talk with your friends, take classes you will enjoy, and a few harmless pranks every once in a while will keep things exciting during those long, tedious school days. Just don't get caught!

Well, I hope my advice has been helpful to you in some way. As I am writing this letter to you near the end of August, I am sure you have nothing better to do anyway. Don't worry, kid. I am sure you are going to do just fine. If you ever need anything, I will be just down the hall, most likely sleeping in Spanish class. Good luck, kid, and try to smile will you? Eighth grade will be great!

Your friend,

Phil Carter

Southview Middle School, grade 8

A Piece of Advice

Connie Cheng

Capitol Hill Magnet, St. Paul, grade 8

We are silent as the echoing hallways as we stand by my locker. I bend over my lock, listening to it whirl and click as I spin my combination one last time. It opens as usual — with a hard tug. I reach over and open my locker with a clang.

She stands behind me as I pull various notebooks and binders out. "So, this is the last day of this school for you," she says hesitantly, not sure how to start a conversation. She has a lot to learn.

"Yeah," I reply nonchalantly, but it's hard to believe that I'm leaving forever. I feel my eyes sting, a sign of coming tears, but I hold them back. Crying isn't something you do in front of seventh graders.

Her neat brown hair swishes into my vision as she bends over to examine my math binder, fallen open to a place filled with complicated formulas. "Eighth grade seems hard," she says. "Look at all this work you had to do! I have no idea how I'm going to survive next year." She tries to end on a cheerful note by laughing weakly and tucking her hair back behind her ears.

I dump my last binder on the ground. "It's hard, but you'll live."

I see her biting her lip nervously as I turn to grab my backpack. "I'm not sure," she replies slowly. "I mean, this year was really a difficult year for me. I nearly flunked math and science — and so much homework..."

Her voice trails off, and she sighs in a hopeless manner. I'm not sure what to say, so I just shove my math binder in my backpack.

She picks up my social studies notebook and skims through it briefly before she hands it to me. "How about if you give me your phone number, and I'll call you whenever I need help?"

I envision myself sitting knee-deep in unfinished homework, trying to explain over the phone what the quadratic formula is, and I shudder. "Maybe," I say, "but I have a better idea."

She perks up instantly, and I feel her hope radiating from her like light from the sun. "What is it?"

"A piece of advice," I answer as I zip up my now bulging backpack.

"Oh." Her face falls, but she quickly makes a joke to cover it up. "What, beat up every seventh grader in sight? Suck up to the teachers?"

"God, no!" I feel a grin spread across my face as I remember my own experiences with seventh graders and teachers. "It can be fun to tease seventh graders, but it's not going to help you much."

"Then what?" She flops down beside me, serious again. "Tell me, please."

My mind flashes back to the beginning of my eighth grade year, so near, yet so long ago. What did I do when I had just received my worst grade ever? What did I do when I failed a test I had stayed up all night to study for? When I felt I could never finish all my homework? When I felt like a failure?

The answer dawns upon me, and I snap out of my trance. I know," I say. "Never give up."

"What?" She frowns, like I'm joking. "That's what they teach you in kindergarten. You know, the story of the little engine who thought he could. You know, 'never say never.'"

"There is a lot of wisdom in 'Never give up,'" I reply, slowly pondering my piece of advice and choosing my words carefully.

"Yeah, right!" she scoffs, turning away.

"No, listen to me!" I raise my voice, and she looks at me, wide-eyed, unsure of what to do. "When you feel you can't finish your work, don't give up. Rush to finish it, and it'll happen. When you fail a test, look through it, see what and why you got something wrong. Don't say 'I can't do this,' because if you do, then you can't do it."

She is still skeptical. "It might happen for you, but never for me."

I look her in the eye. "It will happen for you. If you think you will fail, then you will fail. You will be cheating yourself. If you keep pushing for success, it'll pay off. Really. I know."

She looks down, but I know she believes me at last. I stand up, shouldering my backpack.

"I've got to go," I say. "Just remember what I said, and it'll happen."

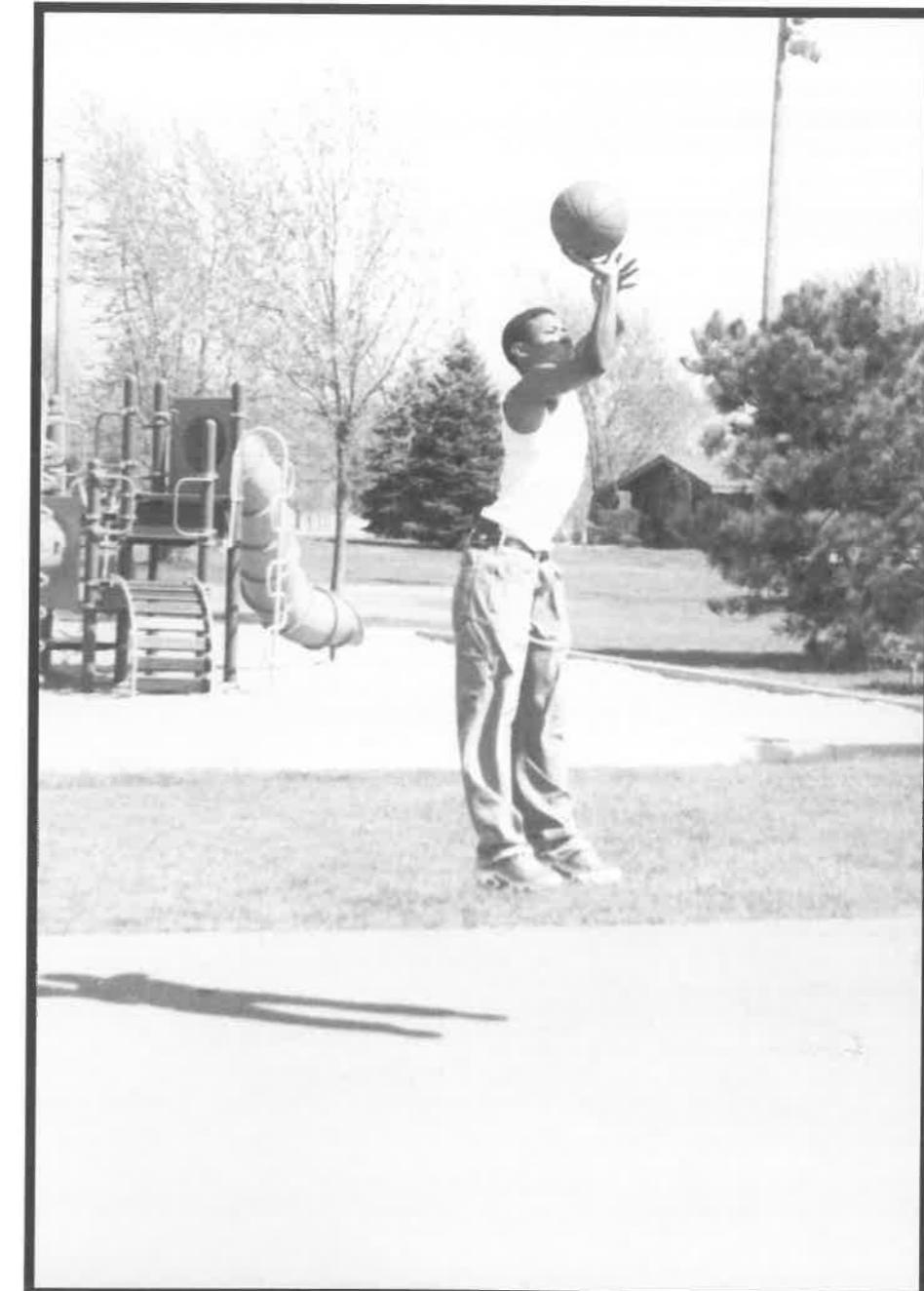
"Yeah, thanks," she says quietly. We hug one last time.

As I leave, I sneak a glance back. She stands up, resolute, and walks off with a glint of determination in her eye. She's already half way there.

Hoops

Darius Holmes

Champlin Park High School, grade 12



Invitation

A Formal Invitation

In her first edition of *In The Middle*, Nancie Atwell wrote about the periodic "writing invitations" she would post in the classroom: calls for articles for various magazines published by the students, calls that would nudge students to share their experiences and expertise in their writing. There is something more compelling about an invitation, a cachet that a mere assignment doesn't hold.

So, this is a writing invitation for the next edition of *Minnesota English Journal: Student Writing Issue*.

On the next few pages are three kinds of writing we would like to feature in the next issue. With these invitations we hope to continue the multi-layered approach of this issue by publishing creative student models along with context features and reflective responses.

In addition to these three more formal invitations, we still invite your students to come as they are, to continue to submit their surprising, creative, delightful, thoughtful pieces, whatever they are.

Besides inviting your students' writing, we would also like to extend an invitation to anyone who is interested in becoming involved in the publishing of this journal. Please contact us if you would like to write a Teacher Talk piece, if you have an idea for a writing invitation, or if you would like to help with the publishing effort.

A submission form is printed on page 79. Please make a copy for each student's writing you submit.

A few tips for student submissions:

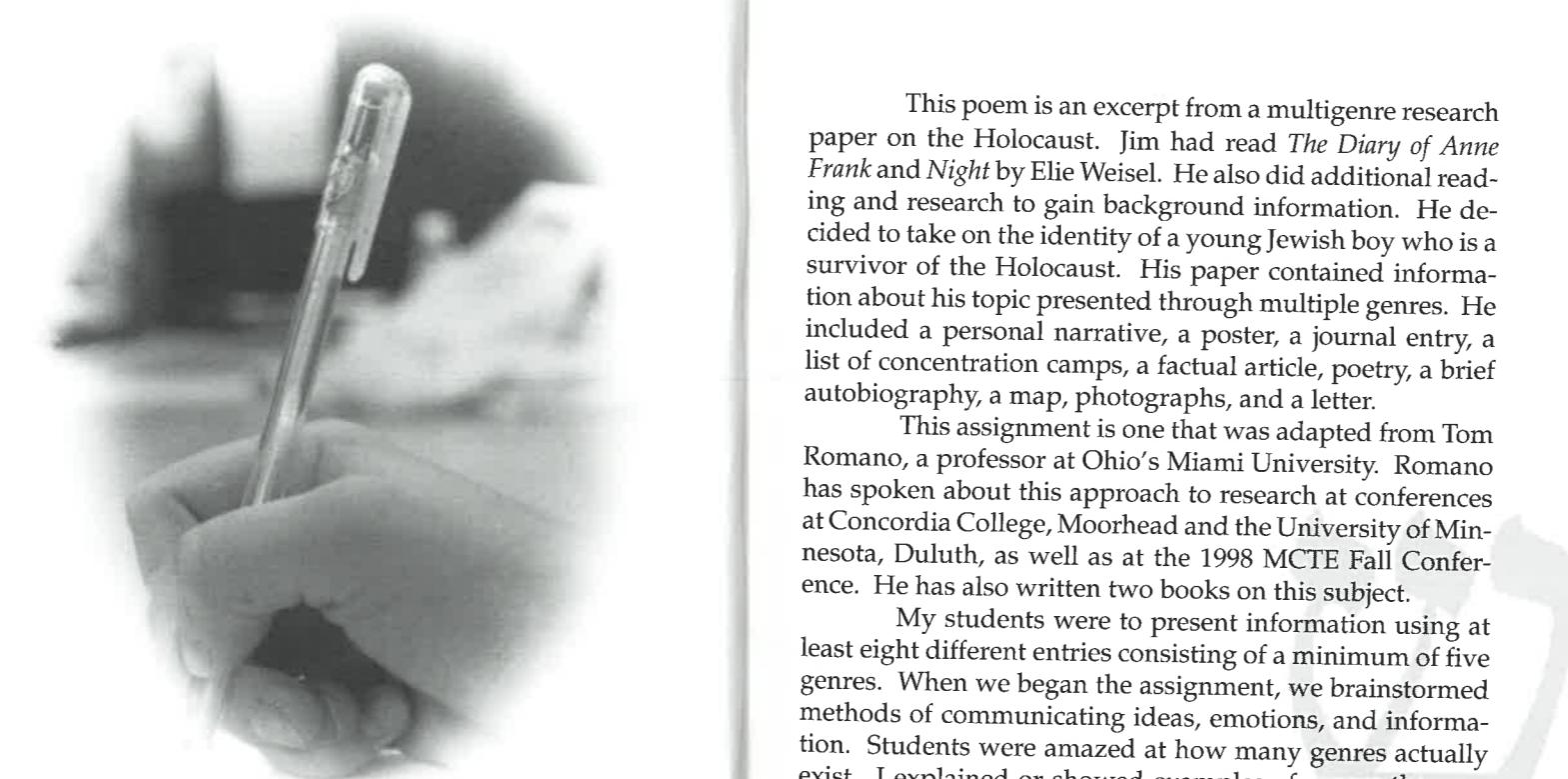
There are space limitations. Shorter pieces are the most publishable. For long class assignments, consider excerpts.

Encourage your poets to think about their spacing, margins, and line breaks. All poems should have titles.

Select the few strongest pieces if you are submitting work from a class assignment.

Word processed submissions are greatly appreciated.

If using writing from this journal as models resulted in some terrific writing, submit it. We would love to publish examples of the power of student models.



Wonders of Writing by Chelsey Mundt

Champlin Park High School, grade 11

Multi-genre

Invitation #1

Sandy Nesvig

Annunciation School, Minneapolis

This poem is an excerpt from a multigenre research paper on the Holocaust. Jim had read *The Diary of Anne Frank* and *Night* by Elie Weisel. He also did additional reading and research to gain background information. He decided to take on the identity of a young Jewish boy who is a survivor of the Holocaust. His paper contained information about his topic presented through multiple genres. He included a personal narrative, a poster, a journal entry, a list of concentration camps, a factual article, poetry, a brief autobiography, a map, photographs, and a letter.

This assignment is one that was adapted from Tom Romano, a professor at Ohio's Miami University. Romano has spoken about this approach to research at conferences at Concordia College, Moorhead and the University of Minnesota, Duluth, as well as at the 1998 MCTE Fall Conference. He has also written two books on this subject.

My students were to present information using at least eight different entries consisting of a minimum of five genres. When we began the assignment, we brainstormed methods of communicating ideas, emotions, and information. Students were amazed at how many genres actually exist. I explained or showed examples of genres they are less familiar with. They were encouraged to use the visual arts to make their final project more inviting and attractive. The papers were graded on the information they presented as well as the creativity and quality of the writing.

Works cited

Romano, Tom. *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1995.
 Romano, Tom. *Blending Genre, Altering Style*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

I Have Lived

Dear God,
 in a world gone mad
 and I have seen
 evil
 unleashed beyond reason or
 understanding
 I was with them,
 feared with them,
 struggled with them.
 And when the killing was finally done
 I had survived
 while millions had died.
 I do not know why.
 I have asked many questions
 for which there are no answers
 And I have even cursed
 my life
 thinking I could not
 endure the pain.
 But a flame inside
 refused to die.
 I could not throw away
 what had been ripped away
 from so many.
 In the end
 I had to choose life.
 I had to struggle to cross
 the bridge between
 the dead and the living.
 I had to forget what I endured.
 I had to rebuild
 what had been destroyed.
 I had to deny death
 another victory.

Jim Kenny
Annunciation School, grade 8

Multi-genre: Turning Points

Mickie St. Sauver

Cleveland Middle School, St. Paul

For a featured section on the multi-genre research paper, we are seeking short, representational extracts, such as the model on the next page, from multi-genre papers written by students of various age levels.

Up until about six or seven years ago, I never really taught "The Research Paper." I hated to admit that I really didn't know how to teach someone to do one; I couldn't remember anything about footnotes and bibliographies, and I didn't really think that it fit with a writing workshop approach, which seemed to me to focus more on creative writing.

As a combined concern from parents looking ahead to the academic needs of their children and from Central High School telling us that students from Ramsey Junior High were better prepared for research than were our students, I felt my students needed to write a research paper. I used the National History Day theme as the topic for our research, giving students a chance to write for a real audience and perhaps combine their research into presentations involving other media. Though I received many interesting papers on a variety of topics, I still questioned devoting so much time to research method and very little time to writing process. We did do peer editing of leads and conclusions, but getting the rough drafts finished, let alone sharing the drafts, was difficult. The paper seemed very cumbersome to work with, and difficult to assess along the way. Finally, I didn't see students' ownership of the material; I wasn't sure they were doing anything more than regurgitating information they copied.

Three books led me to believe there was a better way: *The Story in History* by Margot Fortunato Galt; *Nonfiction Matters: Reading, Writing, and Research in Grades 3-8* by Stephanie Harvey; and *Writing with Passion: Life Stories, Multiple Genres* by Tom Romano. These three resources lead me to try a multi-genre research paper.

The excerpts from the multigenre paper that follow were inspired by combining the History Day topic of "Turning Points in History" with our earlier study of the novel *Shizuko's Daughter*. Throughout that book there were significant turning points in Yuki's life that we talked about. We also did time lines of students' lives, so that they were very familiar with the concept of "turning points" before we started the research. At the same time, we frequently touched on the differences and similarities between Japanese and American customs so that their interest was piqued regarding the two cultures. I introduced the History Day paper to them as "Turning Points in Japanese or Japanese-American History." By this time, not only did they know what a turning point was, they also knew what they wanted to know more about — from Sumo wrestling and Ninjas to the Japanese auto industry to Japanese food, education, and fashion. Since World War II was a common turning point in many of their topics, it was easy to break their papers into three phases for research: pre-World War II, World War II, post-World War II.

Since I have tried the multi-genre research papers, I don't think I've ever taught anything more exciting or more rewarding. In addition, this one project can be used to satisfy the middle level standards in Inquiry (finding relevant information); Read, View, and Listen (nonfiction); and Write and Speak (persuasive writing).

But most importantly, it has satisfied my quest to incorporate the writing process into the research paper; it lends itself to formative assessment; and it gets students involved in thinking about their topic in a way that wasn't possible with a traditional research paper.

Marriage in Japan

Jeannie Johnson

Cleveland Middle School, grade 8

The bride stands in her beautiful kimono, anxiously awaiting her moment of glory. An arranged marriage is beginning. Little did she know that after World War II marriages would change, that arranged marriages would decrease in occurrence and become almost nonexistent, that love marriages would become more frequent. World War II was a turning point for arranged and love marriages, honeymoons and rules for ceremonies.

April 12, 1936

Dear Sister,

I will be getting married in three days. I've met my future husband, Yeshiko, and we've spent quite a bit of time together. Even so, this is an arranged marriage, matchmaker and all. At first, I didn't want to be married, but mother convinced me and woke me up to the fact that I wasn't a child anymore. I really wish I were. I'm very scared of the outcome of this marriage, but I must go through with it. I must honor the family name as you have with your husband. This letter is your invitation to be with me on my wedding day. Everything must be perfect, and it won't be if you're not there at my wedding. I miss you!

Your sister, Yuki

Love marriages before World War II were almost nonexistent, but today arranged and love marriages have exchanged places. Today, 70% of all marriages in Japan are referred to as "love marriages;" the rest are arranged. A love marriage is when a couple meets independently without the help of a go-between or matchmaker. With love marriages, spouses are usually selected from siblings who work at the same business or go to the same school.

She looks beautiful in her kimono, doesn't she? This will be a fine ceremony. Shh! It's starting. She's next to her husband now, and the Buddhist priest is blessing them. They have bowed many times and the ceremony is over. It definitely was blessed!

Marriages in Japan have changed a bit since before World War II, but beautiful customs remain significant and delicate to the Japanese.

I'm so nervous. What if I don't make my husband happy? I will dishonor my family's name. But I do love this man and he is gentle and kind. I love him, and there's no use fighting love and possibility.

This is an excerpt from Jeannie's six-page multi-genre paper on how World War II was a turning point in Japanese marriage customs. Space limitations prevent publication of entire multi-genre papers. For the next issue we invite either excerpts from your students' multi-genre papers or submission of entire papers that we may excerpt as space dictates. As with this excerpt, selected by Jeannie's teacher, Mickie St. Sauver, we would like to illustrate the variety of genre, style, and voice, and give an understanding of the work's general premise or thesis and an explanation of the context of the assignment.

Invitation #2

For the 2002 edition of Minnesota English Journal - Student Writing Issue, we would like to feature a section on poetry written in response to literature. The poem may summarize the work or represent a student's more personal response, reflection, or connection to the work. The two poems on page 73, give an effective summary of the works. The two poems on this page represent a more personal response. The editors encourage submissions inspired by any piece of literature -- fiction, nonfiction, drama -- whether from a work read in class or from a work read independently.

Special thanks to Linda Rief and her students for permission to print the two poems below.

Laine's poem was written as a response to her independent reading of the novel, *speak*, by Laura Halse Anderson.

Unforgotten

Don't fake your innocence
Don't deny you're so wrong
Don't tell me this was an accident
I can't hear your lying song
Don't tell me that you're sorry
You caused me so much pain
Is it my love or my forgiveness
That you're still trying to gain?
Stop that knocking on my broken door
I'll never let you in
I'll show you awful things you did
But where should I begin?
And clearly I don't want to
So turn around and go
Don't dare ask me one more time
My answer remains

No

Laine Remignanti
Oyster River Middle School, NH

Mike wrote this poem in Life Skills class in response to his teacher Kathy Bonaccorsi reading *Tuesdays with Morrie* by Mitch Albom to the class.

How Old is Old?

Old is when one admits to not being able to throw a ball around anymore.
It's when your life suddenly slows down from a raging river to a peaceful stream.
It is when people visit you more than you visit people.
It's when you look back instead of looking forward.
Old is when everything you look at has an explanation.
It is when you know enough to write a book.
Old is the soft brick of death waiting to hit you.

Mike Schuster
Oyster River Middle School, NH

The Lotus Eaters

Green vines creeping,
Women weeping over husbands lost.
Maidens smiling,
Alluring fingers wave,
"Everlasting is this home," they say.

Ships navigating magically,
Sailing slowly to their doom.
Sweet mouths open like a trap,
"Everlasting is this isle," they say.

Landing on enchanted earth,
Men move as if in a dream.
Long hair flashing like rippling gold,
Entrancing them away.
"Everlasting is our love," they say.

Green vines catching,
Closer they come.
A panicked cry.
"This is a trap!"

The men break hurriedly away,
Glancing back on maidens sweet
"Everlasting is regret," they say.

Yvonne Angieri
Valley View Middle School, grade 8

The Hobbit

Far, far away in a fantasy land,
Where the wizards and goblins still roam,
There was a fine hobbit called Mr. B. Baggins
Who lived in a hobbit-like home.

His life was quite simple 'til one certain day,
A party of dwarves "just appeared" as they say.
They swept in his house and demanded a meal,
They drank and they ate with incredible zeal.

They spoke of adventure, of plunder and gold,
Of breathtaking battles and castles of old.
This all quite perplexed him — befuddled his brain,
With unmeasured power, he kept his head sane.

By no fault of his own, he was whisked from his 'bubble,'
That's when he knew he was getting in trouble.
For this traveling life was like none he had known
He felt so afraid, so confused, so alone.

They found a dry cave so they lay down to snore,
But they didn't know 'twas the goblin's front door.
Sir Bilbo awoke when the goblins came out,
He saw them coming — he warned with a shout.

The dwarves were still caught, they were roped,
gagged and taped
What horrendous peril! But they somehow escaped.
They struck out once more in the thick clouded wood,
They just had to make it! I thought that they could.

At long last they made it — the castle of dreams.
There conquest was over, or that's how it seemed.
But there was a dragon, who guarded the horde,
This fierce fiery creature was scared by no sword.

The dragon's life ended, a battle began
O'er who owned the treasure — the fight did not wane.
But when it was over, the hobbit then knew
That there is no limit to what you can do.

Mikaela Hagen

Willow Creek Middle School, Rochester, grade 8

Invitation #3

“Show don’t tell.” I can’t begin to count the number of times I have repeated the phrase in my seventh and eighth grade writing classroom. However, I often wonder if students really know what that means. After all, we “tell” stories, we “tell” about characters, I frequently say, “tell me more,” when I want a student to expand on a description. How exactly does one explain the difference?

Barry Lane, at the 1999 fall MTCE conference/workshop, used the “snapshot” metaphor to explain writing with detail. As I listened to him speak I knew exactly how to answer my question. Now, when I give a mini-lesson on “show don’t tell,” I talk to students about photograph albums. I tell them their writing is like an album full of pictures of a trip they have taken. If they go through the album, merely flipping pages, saying, this is the first day, this is the second day, this is . . ., they are going to bore whoever is looking at their album to tears. However, if they concentrate on one picture, and really look at it close up, and point out all the fascinating detail, they will create interest. They will be “showing not telling.”

The following pieces were written as an exercise in creating “snapshots.”

Sandy Nesvig
Annunciation School

Diamonds at Midnight

Fog settled in on the damp docks of the harbor. The shops bobbed in the wind with the waves bouncing up and down. It was drizzling; the tiny droplets pierced my face like needle points.

My dress was torn and stained with mud. My shoes were pinching my feet. It hurt to walk in the windy rain. I pulled my tattered shawl over my shoulders and tied my bonnet to my head to keep my head warm.

I had done it. I had crept into my mother’s room and in the dark, pulled the sparkling jewels from her secret, special box, hidden in the drawer. No one would ever know, just me and that slimy two-faced man named Frank Orshunt.

I had met him at midnight. He was so quiet; he came up from behind me. He put his filthy, no good hands on my shoul-

The Path

The wind blows in my face as I ride over the black tarred path. Sweat drips down my face, all down my body. In my head I keep a beat, which is synchronized with my feet as they pedal my bike at a steady rate. The only thing I hear is the humming sound of the wheels revolving.

I look to my left as I turn in the path. Between an opening in the trees, I see a little pond with a barn on the other side with hay heaped in it. Then I pass a grove of trees, which block my view of the pond. When another opening appears, I see a small head break the surface of the pond. I stare at it for a split second as another grove passes. I think to myself that it is just a beaver or something, and I keep on biking to my beat. As I bike around the bend, there is a long straightaway, so long I cannot see the end of it.

I slow my beat down to conserve energy, but mainly to take a look around. The scenery around the path is very beautiful. To my right I see a couple of small sloping hills covered in corn stalks, each with a single pine tree on top. As I pass it, I look at the corn stalks and notice how they are in lines that fly by as I bike onward, down the path.

Alex Davis
Annunciation School, grade 7

Barry Lane, at the 1999 MCTE fall workshop, shared techniques for creating ‘snapshots,’ short descriptive writing. For the 2002 issue, we would like to feature short pieces of descriptive writing.

ders and whispered in my ear like a snake’s hiss, “Do you have them?” I shuddered and turned to him. I felt awful, but anyone would do an awful deed if it threatened her life. I handed him the precious diamonds, freshly cut and sparkling. I had to wrap them in a black cloth for fear of someone seeing the shining light.

He was gone, he paid me; not a bad sum either. I am left alone, in the cold and rainy night, soaked to the bone. I shall go now, go home and sleep. I will not sleep well tonight. Not tonight and not for a long time. I will keep thinking about the awful deed I did this night. And I swear, on my life, never will I do such a thing again. However, my life was at stake, and I could not run nor hide. But no one will know, I’ll make sure of that.

Hali Thurber
Annunciation School, grade 7

The Magic Camera

Barry Lane

from *After THE END*

1. Begin by explaining to students that writers have a magic camera that they can point at the world and create snapshots that contain smells and sounds as well as colors and light. Read several examples from literature and discuss why a writer like Laura Ingalls Wilder doesn’t just write, “Ma put the kids to bed and did some sewing until they fell asleep.”

2. Review some of the things writers can do to dig deeper for details when they stall out. Make sure they remember the power of asking questions to dig up more “specific” detail.

3. Ask students to think of a person they know very well. Then ask them to place that person in the middle of an empty page and then pretend they have a magic camera that can freeze any moment in time since they’ve known that person. Web-chart at least five or six moments, briefly noting them.

4. Have students pick one moment and write a snapshot of that one moment. (Make sure it’s only one moment that student write about.) Create a picture with words of that moment. For example, instead of “Dad took me ice fishing,” we have “Dad knelt beside me by the ice hole, his hand in the icy water reaching for the perch that had slipped back in.”

5. Ask students to write for twenty minutes or however long it takes to create a snapshot of their person. When finished, students read over what they’ve written and ask themselves at least two questions that will lead to more detail. Then have them go back and either insert or add this detail to their snapshot.

6. Students share snapshots with a partner or group. The listeners write down questions that grow out of their natural curiosity about the person. The writer adds more detail to the original snapshot.

7. Have students draw a picture of their snapshot, putting in all the detail from their words. Students then add one or two more details from their drawing to their writing.

Additional sources for writing activities:
Lane, Barry. *Reviser’s Toolbox*. Shoreham, VT: Discover Writing Press, 1999.
Barry Lane’s website: www.discoverwriting.com

Dancing with the Angels

Darkness covers the white sheets of snow.

A shadow falls over the night.

I lie awake in bed,

Half dreaming.

Staring out the frosty windows.

I wish I could be out there right now,

Dancing in the snow.

Prancing.

Making footprints.

Making angels, snow angels.

Dreaming of the real angels all around me.

Glistening.

Shining in the bright falling flakes.

Dancing with the angels.

Spinning round and round

As fast as I can go.

Circling the white treetops.

I’m shining in the snow.

All alone in the darkness,

But overcome by the snow’s light.

Dancing with the angels,

The angels of the night.

Madeline Helling

Annunciation School, grade 8

Poetry Workshop

Puddles

Simple and soft
 You try and entangle it about your fingers. . .
 Keep in every feeling, but
 It eventually drips from sight,
 Letting all of the beauty slide into itself
 Just a puddle
 A simple soft puddle
 Now creation the product of desperate minds
 Places watery images
 And blurs of beauty
 Throughout your fingertips
 Like the breath of an approaching kiss,
 anxious and sweet.

Mary Beth Waltman

Richfield High School, grade 11

No Thinking Allowed

Sometimes I try too hard
 To find a poem
 Searching myself
 And the air around me
 For inspiration
 But poems
 Should flow
 From your fingers
 To the paper
 No thinking allowed

Melody Rose

Crosswinds Middle School, grade 8

Dear Algebra Book

I sit here,
 Staring at you.
 Reaching out for you
 With one tentative hand
 But pull back in,
 Looking away.
 You call
 I peek at you
 You glare at me
 Accusingly.
 I know I should open you
 Study like Dad says
 But all of your numbers
 And letter mock me
 Swirling around in odd equations
 That you know
 I can't solve.
 Guilt rises in my throat
 I pick you up
 Swallow hard
 And toss your
 Horrible, judgmental
 Carcass aside.

Kelly Johnson

Osseo High School, grade 10

Native Elders

Winter wind whips across my scarlet cheeks
 Winter snow falls fiercely from the abyss
 Winter sky is gray and sunless
 Winter moon calls my name

Wind is not so strong
 Sometimes it tickles my limbs
 Foreplay to show how wicked it can be

Snow is not always so fierce
 Sometimes it swings sweetly from the heavens
 Blanketing the earth in godlike splendor

Sky is not always so melancholy
 Sometimes the gray will turn white and then pale yellow
 Revealing the springtime cheerfulness

Moon is not always calling my name
 Sometimes she screams or runs away
 And yet, she'll always slide back into dark skies

Wind whispers dreamlike melodies
 Snow sprouts fantasies from hidden lands
 Sky utters tales that twinkle with necromancy
 Moon discourses sweet memories

Even though I exist far away
 My elders call me back
 I can feel their presence close to me
 Calling me

Wind reaches out, sliding smooth fingers through my hair
 Snow falls to the earth, slipping on my rosy cheeks
 Sky stretches outward, wrapping its thick appendages around me
 Moon envelops night, scaring the darkness away from me

Wind sighs, "Finally going home."
 Snow whispers, "Ready now."
 Sky weeps, "Missing my elders."
 Moon coos, "Wanting 10,000 lakes."

Minnesota wind is at my back, singing sweetly.
 Minnesota snow trickles from space, singing sweetly.
 Minnesota sky is pale pink, singing sweetly.
 Minnesota moon smiles sweetly, singing softly.

Abby Marquart

Champlin Park High School, grade 12

Societal Expectations

Buried beneath
a mask cast upon her
by societal expectations.
Lies a little girl,
hidden deep within a body of 18 years.

Her innocence she gave away
to the first who would love her.
Her faith she gave up on,
when the pain was too much to take.
Her beauty she destroyed,
when perfection was something
she knew could never be obtained.

Fending for herself,
the world overwhelming.
Being taken for granted and being hurt
Who stands for those who cannot
believe in themselves?

Used,
as she comes,
Down to her knees.
Believing he'll kiss away the pain.
Forgotten too often,
And she ran to another,
when the pain overtook her body.

Adult,
Child within,
social expectations.
Of a 5'8, 120 lb blonde goddess,
wearing a D cup.
Destroyed the innocence she once held.

Not a child,
yet unable to grow.
Her mask spontaneously disappears.
Used and abused,
is all she's ever known.
Yet her comfort is held
within that knowledge.

Unable to face herself,
She is forgotten within a world,
Of Societal Expectations.

Elizabeth Wagner
Champlin Park High School, grade 11



Strings by Deanna Olson
Champlin Park High School, grade 10

Minnesota English Journal -- Student Writing Issue**Submission Form****Deadline: June 15, 2001**

Teacher: _____

School Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City & Zipcode: _____

summer email address: _____

Was this student's writing the product of a directed writing assignment?

 No Yes If this assignment was not one of your own creation, please give the source for the lesson idea:

Student Name: _____ Grade: _____

School Name: _____

Student's mailing address: _____

City and Zipcode: _____

*The student's mailing address is needed to contact students selected and to send a complimentary copy of the journal if their work is selected.***Certification and Permission**

I hereby certify that this is original work completed by me.

Student's signature: _____

I give permission for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English to publish this work. If this work is selected, I understand that it will be published in book form and identified with the student's name, grade, and school name.
Parent or guardian's signature: _____*(Optional) I give permission for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English to publish this work on their website (www.mcte.org). If this work is selected to be published on the website, I understand that it will be identified by the student's first name, grade, and school name.*

Parent or guardian's signature: _____

Mail the student work and completed submission form to:
Sandy Hayes, 19019 180th Avenue, Big Lake, MN 55309