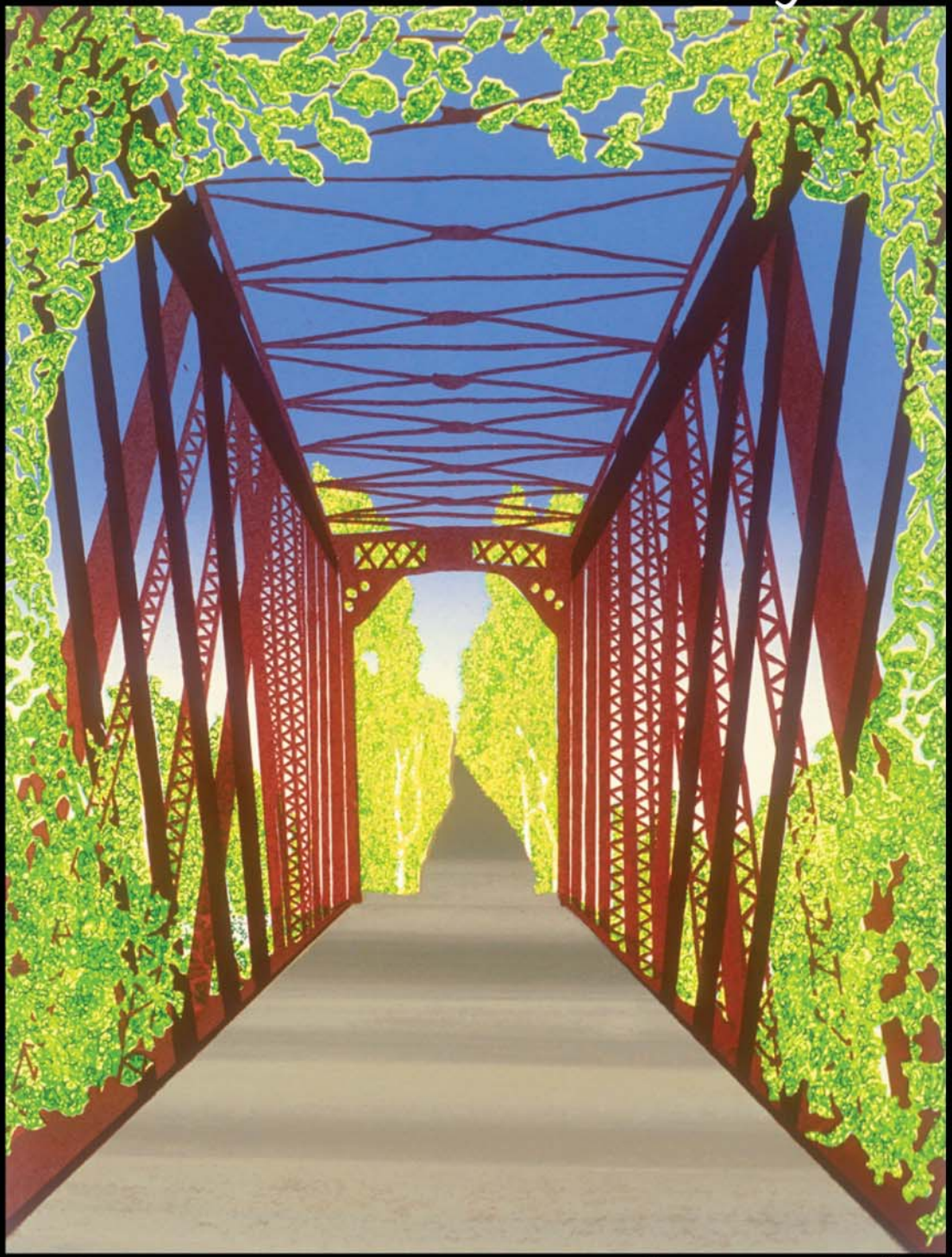
MINNESOTA ENGLISH JOURNAL

The Minnesota Council of Teachers of English



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Minnesota English Journal

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celebrating 47 years of professional conversation and continuing education

Edited by
William D. Dyer
John Banschbach
Minnesota State University, Mankato

Letters to the Editor

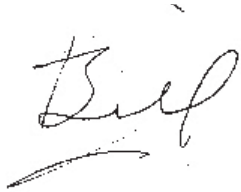
A Call for Responses from the MCTE Membership

Starting with the next issue of *MEJ* (Fall 2009), the editors hope to feature a "Letters to the Editors" section, which could respond to a number of topics. A partial list could include

- The content of articles represented in this issue
- Suggestions about issues in teaching that MEJ's readership should be responding to and writing articles and letters about
- Positions on the state of the profession
- Positions on High School literature, composition, and language standards
- Concerns about censorship
- Concerns about whether a list of books that students should read before graduation should be "standard procedure" for teachers
- Issues surrounding the appropriateness or inappropriateness of teaching certain types of literature
- Issues related to teaching with technology
- Positions on how to teach grammar to students relying on "grammar and spell checks"
- Issues related to literary theory

We hope you'll view this list as we do—a very incomplete set of possibilities. We invite you to send us a letter on a subject that moves you. We would love to receive those "letters" at ***any time during the year prior to June 1, 2009***.

Contribute to our discussion. We look forward to hearing from you.



Bill Dyer
Co-Editor, *MEJ*

A Letter from the Editors—Towards a Conversation:

It's cold, gray, and angry morning. A stiff breeze from the northwest has whipped the Big Lake into a turbid white-capped frenzy that's blowing the surf over the twenty-foot brownstone cliff I'm standing on and threatening to blow my hat off my head and into town. Go Red Sox. Maybe next year.

It's close to noon now. Just three hours away from leaving again to struggle for space on I-35 against huge pick-ups wagging trailers laden with boats and four-wheelers. Its always difficult to leave this place.

Besides racing through a set of papers, I've spent the morning closing down the cabin. I've finished stuffing the walls upstairs in the carriage house with R-38 batts; the ceiling will have to wait for my solitary trip in mid-November. And there'll be no running water when I come back. I've drained the system, said good-bye to the mice in the crawl space, winterized, dismantled my tomato garden on the balcony of the carriage house, and put my toys away. Linda has coached me into remembering what I've done so many times before but cannot trust my memory to accurately recall. Old people. It's starting to smell like team spirit.

I've taken another walk-about to make sure that I haven't forgotten something that might cost me some serious money. And, as I ascend the steep stairs to lock the sliding doors of the

carriage house, a couple of things occur to me. First, I built the thing. That realization always takes more than a moment to sink in. Secondly, I wrote a 250-page manuscript that includes at the tail-end of it some narrative, mostly humorous, about how I built it.

Before Linda and I had left the house in Bloomington for the cabin on Friday, I'd gotten a piece of unpleasant news. A rejection slip from a publisher. It's not the first one. And, I'm fairly certain now, those rejection slips will be followed by others. A blizzard of rejections. Guaranteed. Just in time for winter.

And I fully understand the reason for them. Before I began the manuscript, I knew what I was getting into. I knew going into it that the focus of my work—the fairly anonymous life and work of a carpenter driven by more than one addiction, how that work drew him from Texas to Lake Superior, how our chance meeting and development of an association drew me to understand the teaching enterprise from an entirely new perspective (the working title of the manuscript is *Teaching Fools*)—was slender, and that my potential audience might be too tiny to convince a publisher to take it on. We're talking about the "bottom line" here.

But I'm ok with all of that. And here's why. I had to write that piece. I had absolutely no choice in the matter. I was driven to it. I had suddenly found myself engaged in a complex and absorbing (yes, addictive) process of not only learning about a set of crafting skills that I knew so little about but also tenatively implementing. What's more, I was doing what I'd been carping at my students to do over these many years—"Write about what moves you, engages you"; "Write about what you have a passion for, or need to know or learn, or are curious about"; "Write about you and those things that enter your field of experience that excite you." I'm a visual learner. But, more than that, I learn by seeing and doing and then writing down what I've learned.

Most likely, no one beyond a small circle of family and friends will ever see what I've written in that manuscript. But,

because of what I've written, I've moved what I've learned and written into usable skills. I'll never forget them, despite all the brain cells I've fried. And those skills—the "invention" stage of a building project; the "planning" and "research" stage of discovering what's needed to do it, and whether it's a realistic venture; the "materials list" in preparation for getting started; the actual "composing" and "re-visioning" process; and the "editing" process of actually doing the "finish" work on the inside of the building—are so uncannily similar to the ones used in the process of writing any piece of writing one cares about.

This failure to find a publisher for my manuscript has paid unexpected dividends, though. Regularized writing always does. Over the past several years, I've been involved in a faculty development organization at Minnesota State University, Mankato, called the Valley Writing Project (VWP). This organization began in 1979 to promote writing across the curriculum, and it's succeeded handsomely at that. But recently those of us who plan and stage the annual workshops for VWP have found another important focus for our energies: the promotion of faculty writing. You know—the writing that all of us need to do as a consequence of reflecting on what we do in our classrooms and of collecting the research associated with projects we're pursuing? The writing that most of us have little or no time to do?

Onr "Faculty Writing" workshops involve twenty faculty each winter in the task of helping them identify a prioritized list of writing projects they want and need to pursue (creative writers have always told me that it's better to have two or three of these going simultaneously). Once having located the most important one, they'll need to dedicate themselves—with the help of writing groups of faculty from a variety of disciplines who agree on the rules for meeting regularly, reading their members' drafts carefully, and commenting specifically on the strengths and weaknesses of those drafts—to developing that one project into something that can be submitted for presentation at a conference or for publication. We and our participants will meet as we always do in April to share our reports on our progress and on our perceptions of how those writing groups have contributed

to that progress.

Two things here. First, I can vouch for the effectiveness of the writing groups. I've become a more productive writer from having worked in one. I've found I need the pressure of the deadlines imposed by the meetings of my group. And I've learned a lot about my writing by allowing others to see and react to it. Let's face it: so much of our writing is all about audience. The writing group provides one, and, based on the instructions of the writer who's asking the group to read her piece, we as a group can assume the role of any audience we're prompted to take.

Secondly, a writing group proceeds without an artificial end-point for disbanding. So long as we all get along, we're in it until we retire. That's because our professional writing never stops. We write to teach, and teach to write. We constantly use our writing to reflect upon and re-assess what we're doing. No claims here from me about being a confident or excellent writer. Yet, it seems true that, the more we do write, the more natural it may seem for us to be doing it.

Our little five-person VWP presentation team—a couple of English and Humanities instructors; a chemist; a sociologist; and a social worker—are gathering our materials for this December's workshop. Part of that process requires that we put our money where our mouth is. We are our own five-person writing group. And, as of the beginning of this fall, we've settled upon a research and writing project that we'll be modeling in the workshop. Come this Wednesday, we'll be sharing portions of drafts on a research problem that, when it came to me, nearly caused me to careen off 169 on the way to work. A little voice asked me, "How, if at all, does our own professional writing affect the quality of our students' writing?" That is, how does what the writing projects we're involved in relate to what we do in the classroom? How does/can the process we use to write what we're writing impact upon our students' own writing process? How might our sharing of parts of our work with our students influence the way they look at writing, at us? The question assumes that we are all writing teachers. But it also assumes that

we are all active writers struggling to craft our work into shape the way we're hoping our students will. And we've engineered a session into this December's workshop to get our participants actively thinking about and testing a possible relationship between their writing and the writing they ask their students to do for them.

Investigating these questions will not be easy. Pursuing the investigation requires that we get other instructors to allow us to interview them, follow them around, visit their classes, do surveys of instructors and students. And, of course, we'll need to look at our own practices while at the same time looking back over the archives of previous workshops for a group that we might loosely identify as a "culture of writers" at MSU. But we're excited about the prospect of doing this research and detective work. And doing the writing.

So what? What might any of this have to do with all of us? Well...for my current purposes as editor of MEJ, it means keeping the lines of interactive communication going between me and you. This particular issue of MEJ has been a difficult one to find a sufficient number of submissions to fill. Who knows why? We're all busy. And that's not to say at all that the pieces represented in this issue are not excellent. They, indeed are, and I hope you love them all and find them immediately useful in your teaching. I'm particularly excited about the two essays—one by Scott Hall and the other by Melissa Brandt—on Tim O'Brien's intriguing novel *In the Lake of the Woods* and the conversation that these two essays invite about how to teach a novel that has become a very popular choice among high school and college instructors. I'm even more excited about the research Elizabeth Kirchoff shares about how we present ourselves as teachers in the classroom, the personae we assume, and the details we bring in about our selves and our "others" beyond that classroom that affect the way we teach and what our students learn. We've decided to award Elizabeth with the $350 prize for this issue's best submission. Several other essays provided Elizabeth with stiff competition for the award.

But MEJ isn't about competition. It's about sharing the

work you're doing in your classrooms and the research you're immersed in. Short as well as long pieces, as you can see by scanning this issue. We're all writing teachers. And we're all writers.

That's why it's so important that you consider sending brief pieces to MEJ about your "teaching tips." We've all got them. And that's why I'm hoping that you can also respond editorially to one or more of the subjects we've listed on the invitation for "Letters to the Editor." Your time, like mine, is disappearing as we speak. So many bites being taken out of that "writing time" by meetings, class prep, grading, report writing, training sessions, administrative work—not to mention the good stuff, such as ferrying the kids to hockey practice at 4am and clog dancing practice at 7:30pm, balancing check books, and managing, actually, to speak to the ones we really care about.

We've included in our "Faculty Writing" workshop a session about "Time Management" that asks faculty to experiment with placing a yellow placard we furnish them on their doors with their names and an inscription that says: "WRITER AT WORK—COME BACK IN A HALF HOUR." That assumes that, with a little planning and a limited focus, one can actually do some constructive and intentional writing in 30 minutes. It's what I do.

I'm asking for 30 minutes of your time to help fill out the next issue of MEJ and to make that issue serve the greatest possible number of us. I'd really appreciate it, and I'll be looking forward to hearing from you.

Enjoy this issue.

Bill Dyer
Co-Editor

P.S. I want you to know that this is the second version of this little essay. The first was so much better (same subject, so much more polished and efficient). But last week someone stole the laptop I used to write and store it from my office. I've had to re-construct it. We've all had to do this sort of thing. But remember this—there's no ONE way to write an essay. And the loss of a piece of writing should not deter us from doing the writing. Period.

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Identifying and Supporting College-Ready Writing Skills Among High School Students: An Inter-Institutional Alignment Model

Paul Carney

Introduction

This work was born of confusion and curiosity. After engaging in too many disputes with frustrated college freshmen over below average grades, I conducted an informal research project to ascertain the high school English grades of the students enrolled in the our college's remedial writing course. Responding to my inquiry, high school and college administrators told me that our swelling enrollment in remedial courses was indicative of a freshman class who had performed marginally in high school. Most students who excelled in high school English, I was told, aimed higher and enrolled in public or private four-year colleges.

The data I collected between 2001 and 2003 suggested otherwise. After administering "retro surveys" and examining high school transcripts, I found that almost one third of the students enrolled in our college's remedial writing courses had received above average grades in high school English. Indeed, grades typically do not measure a singular skill, as they may represent the composite of multiple competencies. However, the grade may send a distorted signal to the student, resulting in misperceptions of ability, false confidence and, in many cases, unexpected placement into a college remedial course. This transitional friction between secondary and post-secondary schools provided the impetus

for creating an inter-institutional alignment model designed to identify, clarify, and support college-ready writing skills.

Trends and Challenges

National and state college admissions data point to a disturbing trend among freshmen who require remedial coursework. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, among the 70 percent of high school graduates who enroll in a two- or four-year public college, one third of them take a remedial English or math course. In the California State University System, more than half of its 2002 freshman class was placed into remedial English or math courses (California State University). In Minnesota, 49 percent of the 2002 graduating class enrolled in a Minnesota public higher education institution. 36 percent of these college-bound students took one or more developmental course. Among public two-year community or technical colleges, 46 percent of Minnesota's 2002 graduates enrolled in at least one remedial course (Minnesota State Colleges and Universities and the University of Minnesota). At Minnesota State Community and Technical College – Fergus Falls, 50 percent of entering freshmen are placed into a remedial English or math course.

Further, the substantial institutional and individual investments in remedial courses yield a modest return. The average cost expenditure for remediation among community colleges nation-wide is approximately 8 per cent of a college's operating budget, tallying a national price tag of 1 billion dollars annually (Saxon and Boylan 5-6). There also is an immediate and lingering personal cost to students. For students placed into remedial courses, the realization that the coursework does not bear college credit brings frustration and embarrassment at the very onset of their college career. "You get discouraged. You don't want to tell anybody you're in these classes," says one Atlanta, Georgia, college freshman who, despite her 3.6 high school GPA and a scholarship award, had to take remedial classes in math and reading (Schouten).

While the financial and personal costs of remediation

are noteworthy, perhaps the most disconcerting data relate to the escalating rate of attrition among those students who enter college in the remediation pipeline. Students who take remedial courses are less likely to finish college, and the more remedial courses they take, the less likely they are to attain a degree. More than half of all students enrolled in one remedial course will not persist to earn a degree. Of the students who take three or more remedial courses, less than 20 percent earn a degree (National Center for Education Statistics).

The placement and persistence data on post-secondary remediation reveal some bleak and perplexing numbers that may look even bleaker in the near and distant future. Demographic forecasts and college enrollment data project significant increases in admissions of immigrants, students of color, first-generation college students, and low-income students during the next ten years. College enrollment among African American and Hispanic students doubled between 1993 and 2003. Almost one third of the nation's 17 million college students are students of color, and this trend is expected to continue (American Council on Education). These students, who typically represent the under-served and under-prepared populations in secondary institutions, are enrolling in colleges all over the country with high aspirations and low-level skills.

Stumbling into Post-Secondary Remediation: The Causes

When the Minnesota college-readiness alignment project began in 2004, each site team, comprised of six secondary and six post-secondary English faculty, reviewed the regional and national data on college students requiring remedial coursework. Realizing the futility of dwelling on the data or finger pointing, we shifted our focus to examining the causes of this troubling trend. We asked ourselves, "Why is this happening?" Our discussions explored a vast terrain of possibilities, with causal factors ranging from reduced auto insurance premiums to curricular bypasses. As we contemplated the causes, two distinct yet overlapping themes emerged – cultural phenomena and

institutional practices.

Today's high school students, according to the high school teachers in the project, experience a gamut of personal, financial, social, and emotional problems. As a result, their course performance is neglected or compromised. However, despite their marginal performance, some students expect, even demand, acknowledgment of and praise for their *effort*. Some observers worry that the self-esteem movement that sprouted in the early 1980's has served only to cultivate a generation of less than competent students who feel good about themselves. In his observations of why America schools are failing, Sykes claims that schools have shifted their focus from objective measures of academic performance to a preoccupation with a student's emotional fragility, an approach that eventually backfires when the student encounters objective criticism in college or the workforce (10-14). The C has become the new D, for the notion of having one's work perceived as average can be both devastating and unacceptable. In his book, *Hello I'm Special: How Individuality Became the New Conformity,* Hal Niedzviecki explores the collective consciousness of a new generation bent on exhibiting uniqueness at any cost. According to Niedzviecki, "Today conformity is about doing whatever you feel like, whenever you feel like, so long as what you are doing is all about the new you. Individuality is the new conformity. Institutions take the back seat to our personal quest to be ourselves" (xvi). These and other cultural influences (e.g., "helicopter" parents, indifferent parents, cheating, a dependency on editing software, technology's impact on minimizing language, a preoccupation with grades, etc.) divert students, parents, and teachers from focusing on the requisite rigor and skill mastery for college-level tasks.

These cultural undercurrents flow in a wide, irreversible sociological stream, but they hold even greater significance when examined within the context of a high school's institutional practices. According to the high school teachers who participated in this project, many high school graduates lack college-readiness skills because they strategically avoid rigorous coursework.

In their determination to maintain a high GPA, high school students take the path of least resistance when designing their class schedules, thereby ensuring a spot on the B or A honor roll, increasing their chances for scholarships, and reducing their auto insurance premiums.

In its recent study, *The Toolbox Revisited: Paths to Degree Completion from High School to College,* the U.S. Department of Education found that a rigorous high school curriculum - not family income or race - is the strongest indicator of post-secondary preparation and degree attainment. High school graduates who go on to college concur with these findings. One survey found that only 25 percent of high school graduates felt that they had faced high expectations or that they were significantly challenged in high school. Almost one quarter of them felt that expectations were too low and that it was "easy to slide by" (The American Diploma Project 9). Other institutional causes include: the proliferation of extra credit, which distorts grades and perception of ability; the onset of pre-college complacency due to an empty senior-year curriculum (a.k.a. "senioritis"); large class sizes, which discourage English teachers from assigning "enough" essays; high passing rates for "low-bar" state-mandated proficiency tests that are incongruent with college-ready standards; lack of curricular continuity between grade levels; and insufficient guidance and support services for under-served populations .

Colleges also bear some responsibility in not preparing students for post-secondary success. Disparities among placement tests among colleges within the same system and ambiguous or inconsistent information on post-secondary expectation are some of the ways in which colleges indirectly contribute to the remediation challenge.

A College-Readiness Inter-institutional Alignment Model

This alignment model is designed to facilitate an ongoing dialogue between college and secondary English instructors for the purpose of aligning high school exit competencies with college

entrance requirements. The model is theoretically influenced by the *Bridge Partnership*, which is a project supported by The League for Innovation in the Community College, and by Oregon's PASS assessment system. The purpose of the project is three-fold: first, to design a college-readiness "fence" rubric that might serve as a diagnostic and intervention assessment instrument for high schools; second; to measure and compare levels of reader agreeability between and among high school and college English instructors; and third, to inform high school students of their college-readiness writing proficiency levels.

Since the fall of 2004, four alignment sites have been established in suburban as well as rural regions of Minnesota. Each site connects English faculty from one college with English teachers from two of its feeder high schools. Approximately 400 high school students from eight high schools have participated in the project. Most of the participating students were first-semester juniors enrolled in one of the high school's basic English classes. Students enrolled in college prep or advanced placement courses were excluded from the participant pool. During a 50-minute session, each student composed an essay in response to a common prompt. The prompt was a composite of the writing prompts used for the SAT writing section and the Minnesota Basic Skills Test. The essays were collected, numbered, and distributed for reader scoring.

For an essay to clear the college-readiness "fence" standard, it had to meet college-ready competency in the first three of five rubric categories – content, organization, conventions, sentence fluency, and word choice (see Appendix A). Failure to meet competency levels in content, organization, **and** conventions resulted in a "not college ready" rating. Though we recognized the importance of sentence fluency and word choice in a writer's development, we concluded these were stylistic elements that were not essential for success in entry-level college English courses. Each essay was read by twelve readers – six high school teachers and six college instructors. In order for the essay to be "project certified" as college ready, **eight** of the twelve readers had to rate it as college ready according to

the rubric criteria.

Each site followed a scheduled sequence of meetings and implementation activities (see Table 1). During the first meeting, the project members discussed the causes of the ever-increasing enrollment of college freshmen in remedial writing courses. These discussions, though initially tense and awkward, proved enlightening for college instructors and mildly therapeutic for the high school teachers. During the second meeting, the participants reviewed the scoring data, compared levels in inter-institutional reader agreeability, discussed scoring splits, identified high-frequency error patterns, and made recommendations.

Table 1. The College-Readiness Alignment Project Implementation Chart

Phase I	**FIRST MEETING:** - Discuss post-secondary remediation and its causes - Discuss college-ready writing competencies and expectations - Review college-readiness "fence" rhetoric - Read anchor papers and score sample essays
Phase II	**IMPLEMENATION:** - Distribute writing prompt to high schools - Collect, number, distribute, and score essays - Sort College Ready (CR) from Not College Ready (NCR) - "Micro-score" NCR essays for high-frequency error patterns - Return essays and scored rubrics to students - Survey students
Phase III	**SECOND MEETING:** - Review scores for inter-institutional agreeability - Dicuss scoring agreeability and scoring "splits" - Clarify inter-institutional writing standards and expectations - Recommend support strategies and networks for improvement

Of the 388 total essays submitted for scoring during the project's first two years of project implementation, only 18 percent were rated as demonstrating college ready writing skills. Essays rated as not college-ready were "micro-scored" with a more meticulous application of the rubric. We wanted to provide more precise feedback for students whose essays were rated not college ready. From the micro-scored rubrics,

we gathered aggregate data on high frequency errors for each high school. After receiving their scored essays, the students, in consultation with their English teacher, were asked to review the rubric and identify the strengths and weaknesses in their essay. Subsequent to reviewing their essay, the students completed a self-assessment survey. The survey results indicated that most students who participated in the project, regardless of their essay rating, felt that they gained a clearer understanding of college-ready writing standards. It's also interesting to note that 96 percent of students whose essays were rated "not college ready" were planning to attend college.

In its special report on the high school to college transition, *The Chronicle of Higher Education* surveyed several thousand high school and college faculty members. The survey asked about their respective perceptions of students' preparation for college. The survey found that, while 36 percent of high school teachers felt that students were very well prepared for college writing tasks, only 6 percent of the college faculty responded likewise. Among the college faculty, 40 percent felt that entering freshmen were not well prepared, whereas only 10 percent of the high school teachers felt that their graduates were not well prepared. The Chronicle's research on teacher attitudes reveals the differences in expectations between high school teachers and college faculty.

Our project attempted to move beyond attitudinal comparisons and examine the different evaluative lenses through which high school and college teachers identify college-readiness writing skills. We embarked on answering the research question: How do high school and college English teachers' perceptions of college readiness compare when applying the same rubric to the same set of essays? The agenda for each site's final meeting was to examine and compare levels of inter-institutional reader agreeability.

Two years of data collection show similar patterns of inter-institutional agreeability. During the first year of the project, the average number of essays (191 total essays) rated as

college ready by the high school readers was 72. By comparison, the average number of essays rated as college ready by the college readers was 47. The second year of the project revealed only slightly different numbers. Working with a total of 197 essays, the high school readers' ratings averaged 59 college-ready scores compared to an average of 45 college-ready scores among the college readers. When we reviewed the data and examined our individual scoring grids, we identified the rubric categories that caused the greatest number of inter-institutional scoring splits. The data comparisons and subsequent discussions suggested that college teachers held higher expectations for essay content, particularly in the formation and development of the thesis. After reviewing the data, we speculated that the high school language arts curriculum, in its adherence to the state's high-stakes proficiency exams, may emphasize organization and conventions over content. These discussions proved beneficial to readers at both institutional levels, for they illuminated and clarified commonalities and differences in our expectations of college-bound high school graduates.

Continued Support for College-Readiness Alignment

A fifth alignment site was established in 2006-2007, and approximately 200 high school students participated in the project. Many Minnesota high schools are using the fence rubric to redesign curriculum and assess student writing. The project recently has extended another arm of support to high schools with the availability of an online college-readiness assessment service. Ready or Not Writing (www. readyornotwriting.org) invites high school students to submit their essays to Minnesota college English faculty for college-readiness assessment and feedback. Applying the fence rubric, the college instructors score the essays and offer constructive feedback to the students. In addition to providing reports on individual student error patterns, the program offers high schools aggregate data reports on writing error patterns among participating students.

Students statewide will benefit from a new resource center funded by a $2.2 million grant from the Minnesota State

Colleges and Universities System. The Center for College Readiness, electronically housed at Minnesota State Community and Technical College, aims to improve high school graduation and college participation rates among students who are currently underrepresented in the state's higher education institutions. In addition to expanding availability of Ready or Not Writing to high schools, the Center will develop and implement Step Write Up, a writing readiness program designed to prepare 8th graders for high school language arts tasks.

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Appendix

Ready or Not Writing.org

Online Essay Submission Program for College-Readiness Assessment

To be rated college ready, an essay must meet college-ready competency levels in **Content, Organization, and Conventions.**

Content Section of the Rubric

COLLEGE-READY

The ideas are focused, well developed, and enhanced by details.

- The central idea or thesis is clear and concise.
- The central idea or thesis is strongly supported by well-chosen and integrated details.
- Ideas are fresh, engaging, or sophisticated.

NOT COLLEGE-READY

The ideas may be focused, but they are only partially developed and may lack necessary details.

- The central idea or thesis is present; however, it may be too broad or predictable.
- The central idea or thesis is supported by details, but the details may be general, obvious, or insufficient in number.
- Ideas are obvious or trite.

The ideas lack focus, are under-developed, and have few details.

- The central idea or thesis is without direction or not evident.
- Support for central idea or the thesis is minimal or non-evident; details are sparse, limited or unclear.
- Ideas are obvious, trite, or off topic.

Organization Section of the Rubric

COLLEGE-READY

Organization logically supports the central idea. The order and structure move the reader through the text easily.

- An interesting introduction draws the reader into the paper, and a satisfying conclusion leaves the reader with a sense of resolution.
- Smooth, effective transitions exist among all elements (sentences, paragraphs, and ideas).
- Organizational patterns are effective but unobtrusive. Paragraphing is natural and appropriate

NOT COLLEGE-READY

Organization supports the central idea (thesis). However, the order and structure do not readily move the reader through the text.

- The introduction and conclusion are present.
- Transitions are present but commonplace, forced, inappropriate, or excessive.
- Organizational patterns are present but predictable. Paragraphing is not consistently natural and appropriate.

Organization neither supports nor develops the central idea (thesis). The lack of order and structure detract from the reader's understanding.

- The introduction and conclusion are not present.
- Transitions are nonexistent.
- Organizational patterns are haphazard and disjointed. Paragraphing is not utilized or is misapplied.

Ready or Not Writing.org

Online Essay Submission Program for College-Readiness Assessment

Conventions Section of the Rubric

COLLEGE-READY

○ **The writer correctly utilizes a wide range of standard writing conventions Some minor errors may exist, but they do not detract from the overall quality of the paper.**

Sentence Level Errors	Mechanics	Punctuation	Grammar
❑ Fragments	❑ Capitalization	❑ Commas	❑ Pronoun Agreement
❑ Comma Splices	❑ Abbreviations	❑ Apostrophes	❑ Pronoun Case
❑ Run-ons	❑ Spelling	❑ Semi-colons	❑ Verb Agreement

NOT COLLEGE-READY

○ **The writer shows sporadic control over standard writing conventions. A variety of errors or frequent errors detract from the quality of the paper.**

Sentence Level Errors	Mechanics	Punctuation	Grammar
❑ Fragments	❑ Capitalization	❑ Commas	❑ Pronoun Agreement
❑ Comma Splices	❑ Abbreviations	❑ Apostrophes	❑ Pronoun Case
❑ Run-ons	❑ Spelling	❑ Semi-colons	❑ Verb Agreement

Sentence Fluency Section of the Rubric

COLLEGE-READY

○ **The writing has a natural flow and rhythm.**
- ❑ Varied sentence structure and length demonstrate conscious planning
- ❑ The sentences are rhythmic and graceful.

NOT COLLEGE-READY

○ **The writing moves mechanically.**
- ❑ The writer shows control over simple sentence structure, but uses complex sentences infrequently.
- ❑ The sentence rhythm is attempted but inconsistent.

○ **The writing moves awkwardly.**
- ❑ The sentences tend to be choppy, incomplete, or rambling.
- ❑ The sentence rhythm is clumsy and jarring.

Word Choice Section of the Rubric

COLLEGE-READY

○ **The language is rich, natural, and yet succinct.**
- ❑ Words are specific, precise, and appropriate.
- ❑ Powerful words provide energy for the paper.

○ **The language is functional, and the message is conveyed.**
- ❑ Words are generally correct and appropriate but may be ordinary.
- ❑ Powerful words are occasionally present.
- ❑ Expression is clear but cliches and redundancy may exist.

NOT COLLEGE-READY

○ **The language is awkward and unclear.**
- ❑ Words are limited, dull, and abstract.
- ❑ No powerful words are used.
- ❑ The writer uses a limited vocabulary and/or excessive jargon.

Building a Better Tool-Kit:
The Origins and Construction of a Writing-Intensive Web Site

Anne O'Meara
William D. Dyer

"Building a Better Tool-Kit: The Origins and Construction of a Writing-Intensive Web Site" is a paper about the ongoing construction of a web-site to support instructors at our university who want to improve the writing of students in their courses and to support students to improve the writing they do in their writing-intensive classes or in classes across their course load. Many factors led to the conclusion that such a web site was needed at our institution. It was a long and winding road; readers interested in the journey can read the essay from start to finish. Those who are especially interested in certain stops on the way can follow the links of their choice:

beauty are all you need to know, it is hard to write in ways in which they may be recognized

I. Introduction

Imagine the following scenario. You are an instructor, among many other instructors, at a community college or university whose institution has installed a "writing-intensive" requirement for all of its students. By fall of next year, students at your school must complete two "writing-intensive" courses offered by all departments across the university. As a concerned observer of student writing over a number of years, you believe fervently in the merits of such an initiative. A single course in composition hasn't been nearly enough, you observe, for students to become truly proficient as writers. Furthermore, you may even have considered that your institution's commitment to "writing-intensive" falls short of addressing what's truly needed, noting correctly that students' ability to read critically and analytically (or, even, to read accurately what lies on the page in front of them) has degraded substantially over recent years. Nonetheless, despite your reservations, you heartily exclaim, "bring it on, in spades."

The requirement goes into effect. The courses are taught, and several years later you find yourself on a committee charged with assessing the writing-intensive requirement. Just as we did.

As English professors with some fifty years of experience between us, teaching college composition, literature, and humanities at a four year state university we joined five other professors from different disciplines who also taught writing-intensive courses; the committee (mellifluously called GECCIG)[1] was to assess the quality of writing of all students enrolled in "writing-intensive" courses at our institution over the past year, about eight years after the "writing-intensive" requirement had been implemented and five years since the first assessment of the Writing Intensive requirement. Our committee found that

1 General Education Category Course Instructor Group

students' writing skills (in organization; in their use and management of sources; in the basic skills of writing; in the acts of writing and reading analytically) had, in fact, degraded in relation to the report completed five years earlier.

II. The Existing "W" Requirement

A small portion of ground needs to be cleared before proceeding. Although we have spoken about the outlines of the "Writing-Intensive" policy at our university, the policy deserves a bit more definition. The goals of "W" courses as described in the university catalogue indicate that students will emerge from these courses equipped to "use writing to explore and gain a basic familiarity with the questions, values, and analytical or critical thinking methods used in the discipline" and be able to "locate, analyze, evaluate, and use source material or data in their writing in a manner appropriate to intended audiences." But what makes a writing-intensive course different from any other course at our institution is the "revision" component. And a very muddily-defined component that has turned out to be. Presently, "W" instructors must require a minimum of twenty pages of writing from their students, any ten of which need to undergo a second revised draft under the supervision of the instructor. Not much, you say? Indeed. Over a sixteen-week semester, that translates to a page and a quarter per week.

Beyond the statement of goals and the simple numbers, no standards have yet been articulated concerning those twenty one-draft and ten two-draft pages. They could be, literally, anything. The assumption that "W" instructors generally operate on is that students will be engaging texts in at least some of their papers, but an instructor could assign a series of one-page assignments incorporating no sources. And "revision" has come to mean a variety of things: from two drafts of the same paper with comments in between by faculty to repeated similar assignments, such as responses to readings, with comments on the first assignment being seen as revision comments for the second similar assignment on different readings. Furthermore, several "W" instructors have assumed that the papers they assign ought

to be "argument-driven" and include a certain number of primary and secondary sources. But no firm published advertised standard exists for defining the genre(s) or content or revision of these papers, so there is no clear standard.

To be fair, much of the marginalization of hands-on teaching of writing in "W" courses has occurred because of the numbers—too many students. Enrollments in "W" classes are now generally capped at 25, but there are crazy exceptions (in the sciences) that drive the number much higher. And even 25 is far too high to be able to offer students significant time with their writing and re-writing.

So, if reasons existed for us to try to effect a helpful intervention for those currently teaching 'writing-intensive" courses as well as those new faculty looking for some clear direction, we'd found some important ones. But more significant reasons related to the flawed design of our university's "W" requirement loomed larger within the GECCIG report after the assessment.

III. The GECCIG Report on "W" Courses

Eighty sections of "W" courses from sixteen departments of the university had been taught during Fall 2006. By the end of that semester, instructors had sent 104 ungraded and unidentified papers from their sections, which were chosen randomly for assessment. About a third of the papers came from Biology; another third from English and Humanities; and a final third from a mix of courses from other Arts and Humanities disciplines, Allied Health and Nursing, Education, and Social and Behavioral Sciences. Scores for each essay were compiled; each essay was assessed on the writer's skills in organization and development of information, use of supporting evidence, and overall writing skills. An essay could receive from one to four points on each of the three Writing Areas, and therefore a possible 12 points in all. A score of "4" indicated "exemplary" skills, "3" that the writer was "accomplished," "2" that she was performing on a "developing" level, equipped with some skills but lacking some essential ones, and "1" that a writer was "beginning" and lacked the requisite skills. The average total score, obtained by adding

the individual scores on all three assessment areas, was 6.4 .The average ratings of the three individual assessment areas were:

Table 1: Average Scores of Writing Sampled

Writing Area Assessed	**Mean**	**S.D.**
Organization and Development	2.14	0.79
Supporting Evidence	2.01	0.79
Writing Skills	2.33	0.70
Average	2.15	0.79

In all cases, the scores for these general education writing students place them in the "developing" range. In terms of organization and development of ideas, the mean score was 2.14. Forty-five percent of student papers contained a sufficiently specific organizing thesis with well developed supporting points that addressed questions and values or demonstrated methods of critical thinking or analysis related to the field. Regarding their demonstrable abilities at using supportive evidence, students' mean score was 2.01 (just barely above the cut-off point for the "1s", indicating no skills at all). Only thirty-one percent of student papers demonstrated college-level skills in selecting and using evidence to support their points. In papers with lower scores on this measure, the relationship of evidence that was offered to the point it supported was not clear, or the evidence was not sufficiently analyzed, explained, or applied. In the area of basic writing skills, students' mean score was 2.33. After adjusting for the change from a 3-point measurement scale used five years earlier and the committee's new 4-point scale, it was determined that students assessed during the 2006-07 academic year actually scored lower than the students assessed in 2001-02.

Our assessment certainly demonstrated multiple problems—in definition of the requirement as well as in performance by students. Some of these problems (the definition of the requirement, for instance) can be handled through faculty agreement and subsequent action. But the committee outlined additional problems in the way the requirement was being handled

administratively: The writing intensive requirement had been implemented (1) without any training for faculty from disciplines charged with fielding such "writing-intensive" courses; (2) nor any incentives for recruiting the very faculty most eager and equipped to teach such courses; (3) nor sufficient organizational support mechanisms such as a well-staffed writing center trained to aid students in their struggles; (4) nor any definite requirement that students signing up for these "writing-intensive" courses would have completed a Composition course beforehand. And, finally, this new institutional "writing-intensive" initiative required students to complete their two "W" courses at the "General Education" level as a graduation requirement rather than including one "writing-intensive" course as part of their major field of study, where theoretically teachers and students would have more discipline-specific knowledge and methods to share. Many of these problems center around faculty training and incentives, so the specific recommendations made by the committee on these matters may be worth reading. Although these and other recommendations were thoroughly discussed with administration, no action has yet been taken.

If it accomplished nothing else, our engagement in this frustrating process with the administration was to make us angry. But "angry" is useless. Latching on to the GECCIG committee recommendations to recruit, provide training, and provide incentives for faculty interested in teaching "W" classes", we chose training as the focus for continued action. With no resources or university mandate to train faculty directly, we determined to develop a "writing-intensive web site" with resources for faculty and students.

IV. The IPSEL Grant

Some six months after we'd emerged from the GECCIG "1c" assessment procedure and shared the results with every department chair across the campus, an opportunity to create something to help both teachers and students with their struggles in writing-intensive courses presented itself: THE IPESL (Initiative to Promote Excellence in Student Learning) GRANT. It

was deep into November. Just as we and the rest of our Valley Writing Workshop team, which presents faculty development workshops on teaching writing and faculty's own writing, were scurrying to pull together the pieces of our three-day December workshop on "faculty writing," an announcement of a "call for grant proposals" appeared on e-mail. MnSCU would be offering through our university's Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETL) a group of small grants to faculty members or teams of faculty who would use the funding to incorporate critical thinking in their classes. More specifically, successful proposals would have to demonstrate a clear plan to develop, implement, and assess "new instructional or curriculum materials" or "new support mechanisms." We had four days from the time we learned about these grants to the application deadline to develop an idea, write it up, and mail it in. We just made it.

This grant, literally, had our name on it. Why? Because we'd been entertaining the idea of just such a "support mechanism" for "W" courses since our GECCIG frustrations. We'd used a number of WID and WAC web sites that contained wonderful materials and we'd recommended them to our students, but many of these seemed so huge, so distant from our circumstances, so layered, and, sometimes, so difficult to navigate. Perhaps we could engineer a web site tailored to support *our* "W" courses, *our* fellow teachers who'd be struggling to deliver them with no training or resources, and *our* students who could use all the transparency we could muster concerning the kinds of assignments they'd be expected to respond to and some supportive materials that would help them to succeed in them. In short, our goal was a functional, all-purpose tool kit for faculty and students.

And that's how we defined our purpose on the grant application: "The intention of this project is to develop and maintain a web site to provide continuing support to all teachers confronting the challenge of designing, teaching, and assessing writing-intensive (1c) courses in their disciplines as well as assisting students to succeed in them." We foresaw the prospect of great collaboration among those teaching "W" courses, in sharing not

only " best practices" of those teaching such courses but also their best assignments as well as their students' best responses to those assignments. The affected student population of such a full-access project could well be all undergraduates faced with the prospect of completing the 1c requirement at our university.

Since the grant insisted that successful grants should prioritize critical thinking skills, we needed to show how our projected web site would engage critical thinking. Our university's 2006-2007 Undergraduate Bulletin defines critical thinking as "(a) gather[ing] and analyz[ing] information in ways useful for solving problems; (b) weigh[ing] evidence for and against hypotheses; (c) recogniz[ing], construct[ing], and evaluat[ing] arguments; (d) apply[ing] appropriate critical and evaluative principles to texts, documents, or works—one's own or others'—in oral, visual, or written mediums." Obviously, these skills are directly targeted in "W" courses. And, since writing *is* another kind of thinking, we had no difficulty making the case that the needs of critical thinking would be served in every aspect of this "support-based" web site project.

Of course, there was the issue of "technology" to negotiate in the grant application. How would a couple of marginally technically literate instructors develop the expertise and (more significantly) free up some time to create and manage a web site that, by definition, would need to keep on growing and responding to the needs of the dual audience it meant to serve? In the grant proposal, we were able to claim legitimate access to support: a G.A. working in English Department publications with the technological skills to build the site according to our specifications. Through continuing interactions between the web site manager and the grant applicants, a methodology for organizing materials to be uploaded to the web site would evolve, we promised. Those materials would be funneled to specific categories, not restricted to: (1) types of writing assignments for stretching students' abilities at critical thinking; (2) methods of assessing student writing; (3) strategies for assisting student research; (4) strategies for assisting students in re-writing and editing; (5) access to established web sites that support writing and critical

thinking; (6) methods for engaging students in peer review of drafts; (7) rubrics for evaluating student writing; (8) examples of assignments developed by our collaborating "W" instructors in specific courses, complete with outcomes and objectives, "tool boxes" of supportive materials for students, and assessment mechanisms. The web site would, we indicated, eventually provide an interactive feature to facilitate communication with 1c instructors, seek input concerning their needs, and request them to use "D2L" (i.e., "Desire to Learn," our campus' current electronic platform for launching online courses and supplemental materials) to upload materials from their classes that would be useful to other "W" instructors. The web site would also include materials implemented in our own "W" courses to be taught during spring semester 2008, materials developed by the presenters of the Valley Writing Workshop team for the December 2007 "Writing Intensively" workshop, and postings of faculty pro jects from that workshop for their "W" courses across the curriculum, we promised. Thus, the web site was meant to represent a continually-updated and growing resource.

And we got the grant.

V. The Valley Writing Project

To fully convey our sense of the importance of what we're doing and why we're doing it, we need to develop one more organic connection to the "W" web site project: the on-going work and workshops of the Valley Writing Project (VWP). From its creation with a big Bush grant back in 1979 to the present moment, VWP has become an institution at our institution. Simply put, VWP was built to engage our faculty in Writing-Across-the-Curriculum activities (our organization is the last one still operating out of all the faculty-driven WAC groups begun under the same grant at all of the State University campuses). Driven by a five-person presentation team, VWP has typically recruited twenty faculty per year from all corners of the campus for its annual three-day December workshop.

Regardless of our fields of expertise (besides the two of us from English and Humanities, we're represented by a soci-

ologist, a chemist, and a social worker), we're all *writers* and *writing instructors*. Our presentation approach has been largely inductive—we've found that these workshops go best when our participants are *writing* and talking to each other about their writing. And we customarily use frequent, short cued writing prompts as a means to move participants toward brief, focused presentations on a variety of topics (using peer groups; developing new writing assignments; sharpening their understanding about the importance of "audience" in their and their students' writing; the use of faculty writing in their classes; and, in our current workshop on "faculty writing", engaging participants in discovering the ways that faculty writing might positively impact upon student writing) while leading them toward the realization that *all* of us are writing teachers, regardless of discipline or formal training.

Since 2001, our presentation team has recalibrated our mission to include two types of workshops: (1) "faculty writing" workshops that help faculty develop and prioritize and build schedules for their own professional writing, with the introduction of time management strategies and the formation of faculty writing groups that will keep them on task and make them more productive writers (complete with signs with "Writer at Work—Do Not Disturb" and their names printed on them, along with a manila envelope for sending their work out); and (2) "Writing-Intensively" workshops that facilitate the building of "W" assignments to be implemented into faculty's classes, along with the creation of a "tool kit" of supportive classroom activities, rubrics, scaffolding mechanisms, research strategies, approaches to revision, and assessment tools that are meant to help students successfully respond to their assignments.

The key to both of these workshops is the April "reunion" where participants convene once again to share reports on what they've done, how the writing has gone, and to what degree they've met the goals they set for themselves during the workshop. The outcome for all of us, regardless of whether we're focusing on faculty or student writing, is that presenters and participants will have posted the materials they've devel-

oped on the VWP D2L site so that, where appropriate, we can share these resources with other interested faculty.

With no other means on campus for preparing faculty charged with teaching "W" courses, VWP has gained a little traction in this area. More importantly, though, our VWP web site becomes the means for sharing what others have been doing in their "W" courses, and archiving what we've done in our workshops in an on-going way. We've always understood as an organization that "W" is all about developing one assignment and one assignment package at a time, with an emphasis on the entire reflexive "tool kit" that keeps the assignment running smoothly.

VI. The VWP "Writing-Intensive" Website

Our "W" web site project (http://english.mnsu.edu/vwp/index.htm) posed a significant "audience" problem for us. Before we began collecting materials, we agreed upon the necessity of building something that would be ours, that would reflect what we and other "W" instructors at our institution do, and that would personalize what we're doing. We continue to see ourselves creating materials that are meant to carry on a conversation with instructors and students of these courses. We expect the site to be responsive to what they tell us about it, what they need and how they need it.

Once we had settled upon MSU "W"teachers and students as our audience, we knew that much of what we wanted to refer our students and instructors to had already been created, and that it would be much more efficient to link to some of those materials—materials from other online writing labs–than to re-create them. But we were also able to identify areas that we could and should construct ourselves, ones that hone in on the assignments that our "W" instructors most often expect their students to respond to. We also understood that our opportunity to use our site to establish a reflexive relationship between "W" instructors and their students originated directly from the idiosyncrasies of our institution's under-supported "writing-intensive" requirement and our attempts to address those gaps. Thus,

knowing the immediate needs of our students and faculty in "W" courses would be the first step in our efforts to represent them on the web site.

To find out what our local audience needed, we scheduled a series of meetings to ask them. We arranged to have ourselves placed on the agenda of the respective department meetings of the English, Philosophy, and Biology departments (the departments that fielded, by far, the greatest number of "W" courses in the General Education curriculum), gaining their permission to share with them our intentions for the web site, our desire to collect specific information from each group about the writing assignments their faculty customarily assigned in their "W" classes, what they intended to accomplish with those assignments, and how they managed issues like revision. At the end of our first meetings with those departments, we requested that individual faculty from those units send us materials of the following types:

1. the expectations an instructor would hold about a specific kind of assignment (e.g., in a literary analysis paper, the necessity of reading a work of literature very closely, perhaps several times, to become acquainted with the constituent elements, and then to focus specifically on the details related to one element for analysis, such as character)
2. the methods of thesis development and organization appropriate for it (e.g., what might constitute a good, arguable thesis in a single sentence, and what wouldn't, with examples)
3. the methods and types of evidence related to it (e.g., in a literary analysis paper, the need to incorporate quotes and paraphrases from the primary text carefully and clearly, and similar materials from secondary sources if required)
4. the things that an instructor would most highly value, or least value, in a response to that assignment (e.g., for a literary analysis paper, the value placed on a strong

position taken and a framing introduction, as opposed to what would be inappropriate—providing merely a plot summary of a work or conducting an analysis without using any specific details or quotations from the work in question)

After we'd gathered those materials, we divided the task of creating descriptive and explanatory materials for those specific assignment, had our tech support person load them onto a template we had developed together (complete with VWP logo), and brought what we had created back to teachers in English, Philosophy, and Biology for their scrutiny. We then used their critiques to add, delete, correct, and polish those materials for a second faculty review.

Once we'd gained their approval, we solicited excellent examples of student responses to the assignments they were using. This last item continues to be problematic. A few faculty continue to be hesitant about furnishing student work, perhaps out of fear that responses to a current assignment might be compromised. In other cases, it may not be convenient, during a particularly busy period, to identify and send those papers to us, or it may be difficult to access papers that have already been returned to students. And, of course, students need to be consulted and give their permission for the use of their work, and that work must be used with confidentiality. So, our collection of student writing continues to lag behind our collection of other materials related to "W" assignments.

Once we had some significant assignments and materials to explain and support them, we attended to the design of the site and the clustering of those materials. With the trained eye and technical skill of two graduate students to guide us, we spent most of our energies on the layout of the site's "Welcome" page. We wanted that page to direct our audience of students and instructors to materials that would be most immediately helpful to them, but we didn't want to exclude either audience from access to anything. That intention required the development of a conversational tone and level of language that was transparent, friendly, low on jargon, identified our objective of providing

"W" support, and invited both audiences in. We needed to avoid overwhelming either audience with text. Also, the links we'd be directing our dual audience to click on had to be brief, directive, and logically sequenced—lots of open space, easy contact between the eye of the viewer and useful points of destination.

Website Section: Valley Writing Project

And, consequently, we designed our **Welcome** page with the following components. In the upper left-hand margin we installed a menu containing several links. The **Valley Writing Project** link takes the visitor to the **Mission Statement** of VWP and introduces the current staff (**About Us**). Two additional links take the viewer to descriptions of VWP's two types of workshops—teaching writing-intensive (**VWP Workshop 2007**) and faculty writing (**VWP Workshop 2006**). A fourth link provides the viewer with a description of our institution's writing-intensive requirement and an executive summary of the 2006 **Writing Intensive Assessment Report**, along with the rubric our committee used to arrive at our assessment. A fifth link will eventually carry the visitor to a series of **Archives** of materials that VWP has used over the several years of its existence, once they've been gathered.

Website Section: Resources for Writing

Following the Valley Writing Project section is another set of four links that direct students and instructors to the site's "W"-related resources. The first of these links, **Resources for Writing**, opens into a second-level series of menus: **Reading into Writing, Writing Process Tool Kit,** and **Writing in the Disciplines**. Much of this portion of the site remains under construction; we spent most of our time on the **Writing in the Disciplines** (WID) section, which is currently further divided into "Biology," "English," and "Philosophy." These sections are where we included the information about assignments that we gathered at the departmental meetings described above. The "Biology" section contains information about writing Scientific Papers (for the uninitiated, these are similar to lab reports we

may have written in the past). This section includes information on the usual sections of the paper and advice for what to include, what style to use, and what shortcuts experienced writers take. As with all the papers described in the WID section of the website, this section ends with what is valued and what is not in these types of papers.

The "English" section of the WID portion of the website includes similar information (expectations for assignments, types of evidence, how to cite evidence, and what's valued and what's not) for several common English assignments: Response, Analysis, Comparison/Contrast, Essay Exams, Research Papers, Annotated Bibliography, and Review. "The Philosophy" subsection contains a link to a site on "Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper" and specific information on several common Philosophy assignments: Response/Discussion Papers, Argument/Position Papers, In-Class Essay Exams, Critical/Analytical Essays, and At-Home Assignments. Though some of these assignments are called the same things as English assignments, the expectations are quite different. What constitutes an argument or evidence varies a great deal in these two disciplines and those different expectations and values are clearly addressed in these sections.

The other two parts of the **Resources for Writing** section, as we said, are under construction. **The Writing Process Tool Kit,** like the **Writing in the Disciplines** section described above, is intended to offer advice that could be used by student writers or by teachers as they introduce and discuss assignments. The toolkit is more general than the discipline-specific conventions and expectations discussed above; the toolkit will eventually contain information on "College Writing," "Planning," "Writing a Draft," "Getting a Second Opinion," "Revising & Editing," "Finalizing the Paper," "Analysis," and "Links" to other toolkit-like sites. The Analysis section, the only complete one to date, has been given special attention. In this case, the term "analysis" pertains to one of the most overlooked and difficult-to-perform aspects of building an effective argument—introducing, integrating, and moving quotes and paraphrased in-

formation in support of a position. This page clearly defines this kind of analysis as the process of interpreting and understanding the quotes in question according to how and why they support a writer's position. Additionally, the page provides portions of real student papers, an opportunity for students to participate in the process of grasping how "analysis" works when it works, and when it doesn't. We've tested this page on our students; they've been able to implement their understanding of what's on the page as they do their own writing. The final "Links" on the **Writing Process Tool Kit** menu takes visitors to two excellent writing centers—Purdue's OWL and the George Mason University Writing Center; each site contains multiple handouts on writing, writing problems, and writing in the disciplines.

In our 2006 assessment of students writing, we felt that one major difficulty was in the reading-writing connection. The **Reading Into Writing** portion of the **Resources for Writing** section is meant to provide support here. Chemistry professor Marie Pomije (a member of the VWP team) has loaded on a useful Power-Point presentation on effective note-taking ("did you know that we forget 47% of what we hear in twenty minutes, and 62% in one day?") in the sub-section labeled "Note Taking."

Website section: Resources for Teaching

By far, we've been able to fill the **Resources for Teaching** area, the third of the four sub-divisions of the site, with the richest amounts of materials. The divisions in this area include: **About College Writing** (making, we believe, an important distinction between high-school writing and college-level writing), **Designing Assignments, Teaching Thinking, Teaching Reading. Teaching Writing, Using Peer Groups, Responding to Student Writing, Assessing Writing** and **Online Resources** (while you are on the menu where "About College Writing" is situated, you might take a few moments to navigate around and within these areas—they contain lots of material). These sections, aimed at teachers of writing-intensive courses, usually contain information taken from our own experience as well as specialized materials and activities from a variety of well-estab-

lished web sites such as those at M.I.T., Dartmouth, Marquette, UWisconsin-Madison, the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, Penn State, the WAC Clearing House at Colorado State, and more. Perhaps the most important information keyed to this link is located in the "Designing Assignments" area. We delineate the process for creating assignments that grow from the goals and objectives of a course and are tied to an instructor's specific rubric for evaluating them. Visitors are directed toward other online sources to supplement what we've provided.

Website section: Sample Student Papers

Sample Student Papers is the last link on our site. It's crucial, we believe, to provide students as well as faculty with a reality check on what a good paper looks like, on what is possible. There's no reason to look at anything but good ones. We want our students to be directing their efforts to "the possible," knowing that their peers have already realized success. And instructors who are new to "W" courses, particularly those who haven't even remotely thought of themselves as writing instructors and haven't the experience at evaluating papers outside of their disciplines, might find these papers useful. So far, within the **English** segment of this container, we have examples of a "Researched Argument" paper that was assigned within a Humanities 282W course on Latin American Traditions. The section includes a full explanation of "The Assignment" (and the four options attached to it); a section called "Understanding the Assignment," which provides information to students about developing theses for this paper, preliminary tasks used to put students in touch with some basic knowledge of the culture in question (some information about the history, religion, geography, topography, politics, and Amerindian aspects of Salvadoran culture), possible research materials to use, and ways to use personal experience in the paper; and finally two staged drafts of four separate student papers (complete with a full set of electronic marginal and end comments for each staged draft)

We've placed several sample papers for several Philosophy assignments within the "Philosophy" segment. Each

paper is keyed to an assignment list, also included. In the coming months, we'll solicit papers for the "Biology" segment (certainly lab reports) along with papers representing "Other Disciplines."

Web-site Connections

Finally, two more points about the layout require mention. Returning to the VWP Homepage, you will notice that the last item in left-hand menu reads "English." We aren't entirely happy about the fact that hitting that link takes the visitor to the English Department "Home Page" because it seems to support the idea that writing is an English-Department-only activity. But providing our site with a temporary home while it is still in the "experimental" stage and until the site is ready to become independent enabled us to make it available for others at the university to see and use. Since both of us teach out of the English Department, the "English connection" has been convenient. The site is now viewable beyond the university and, in the next few months, we'll seek wider exposure by attaching the site to the "Academic Affairs" portion of the university web site. Secondly, a short menu on the right-hand side of the "Welcome" page indicates "Quick Links." These are navigational links, not new information. They're meant to direct new and interested "W" instructors quickly to materials that will best and immediately serve them: "About College Writing;" "Designing Assignments;" and "Commenting on Papers." We want them to experience no confusion or delay.

If things work as they have been these last few months, faculty from across the university will continue to help us construct parts of the web site, in specialized ways. They'll determine how it must evolve according to their needs and the needs of their students. And that's what justifies the creation of *our* web site—if we continue to do it correctly, it will reflect what we and our students are doing and the unique demands of our courses, as we continue to teach and change them.

And we all have a stake in what we create.

VII. Conclusions

Although we have, with technical help, built a web site, we recognize the enormity of the project. We've barely poured the foundation, raised and braced the walls of it. And, what's more, it will never reach anything approximating completeness. No "model home complete with furniture and accessories" here! But we are both comfortable with that reality. It's the process that matters most to us—ours as well as our collaborating colleagues who teach and students who write. Working on the site continues to be humbling; it caused us to know what other larger reputable sites look like, what their strengths and weaknesses are (enabling us to better direct our students to other excellent sites beyond Purdue's OWL) and that even these are constantly under construction. We've become familiar with what others, also struggling to teach their "W" courses, are doing, and how they are doing it. That on-going reciprocal pedagogical conversation has to be a good thing. We have, as a consequence of building the web site, subjected our own practices in our "W" courses to close scrutiny.

The result?—we've made ourselves more accountable as "W" instructors, taken pains to explain more fully what we want our students to write; shared our evaluative rubrics with students on our syllabi; described the process by which we scaffold their assignments and engage them in in-class "responding" activities; used electronic commenting as true and sympathetic editors would in encouraging at least one additional draft; explained how we would use the first draft for comments but only grade the second draft; and foregrounded issues of plagiarism, correct documentation, evaluation of sources, and the true meaning of "analysis." In other words, the creation of this web site has caused us to make our "W" courses "Comp" classes. And they *are*.

Finally, we've re-discovered that students appreciate seeing the really good work of their peers. And they particularly appreciate being asked if their work can be shared with other students if they are certain that it will be used respectfully and constructively. We'll continue to add their papers to the web

site as we attempt to include them in the continuing conversation with those who teach the "W" courses about the writing enterprise—a community of writers. And that's our hope for the VWP "W" web site—a continuing, truly reciprocal conversation about writing

Recommendation 2. There should be training and incentives (including course cap of 15 and a load-multiplier) for teachers of writing-intensive courses.

Training: Teachers of writing-intensive courses should go through training such as Valley Writing or programs in CETL [existing faculty development opportunities on campus]. Training should include at a minimum discussion of: the objectives, the assessment rubric, and the writing-intensive requirement itself, including what constitutes revision and how to encourage it effectively. Ongoing university-wide support should be instituted in such forms as a Writing Intensive website of course materials and meetings of writing-intensive instructors, sometimes jointly with English 101 instructors and on occasions such as Faculty Development Day. The scoring rubric for writing intensive assessment should be discussed among the writing intensive faculty and amended if necessary. A Director of Writing Intensive courses who trained, oversaw, and ran assessment would be a good hire.

Incentives:
--**Course size in Writing Intensive classes should be capped**. In discussing class size for writing classes in English, ADE (Association of Departments of English) guidelines say that "The number of students in each section should be fifteen or fewer, with no more than twenty students in any case." They further remark that no teacher of writing should have more than three writing sections (60 students) per term.

--A load-multiplier, like the one attached to graduate courses (4 hours load credit for a three hour course), should be applied. Rationale: These two incentives may draw more teachers into the teaching of writing across the disciplines and allow teachers the time necessary to plan, guide, and respond productively to student writing. As ADE explains in discussing class size:

> "The process of learning to write clearly and effectively is not a simple matter of acquiring information or memorizing rules. It requires a parallel and simultaneous process of learning to read with more sophistication. Because reading and writing are related activities, learning to write entails a complex interaction between writer and reader. Students write; teachers respond. But a teacher's response must be more than "correcting" and more than perfunctory grading. Evaluations must involve a detailed reaction, often in conference with the student, to each piece of writing. Good teachers want to teach as many students as they can teach well. But if teachers are forced to respond to the writing of more than sixty students weekly, they will necessarily oversimplify their responses. Their students will not learn that the basic ingredient of good writing and good reading is the ready and vigorous ability to understand, to formulate, and to express ideas. Students will regard their own writing as a mere exercise, unworthy of careful attention or serious thought."

It is worth emphasizing that the teaching of writing is also the teaching of reading. The GECCIG commented on their teaching experience that students' inability to read complex arguments went hand in hand with their inability to formulate and support good arguments in their papers. Faculty need the time that it takes to work with students on both reading and writing across the disciplines.

Although clearly more practice might help students, feedback is the key for developing writers. As Derek Bok remarks in his book, *Our Underachieving Colleges*,

> Even students who have many papers to write may make limited progress unless their instructors give them ample, timely feedback, not only on the substance of the papers but also on the quality of the writing. ….Adequate feedback will rarely come about through exhortation from on high. More substantial

> efforts are needed to engage faculty members from a variety of disciplines in reading and critiquing student papers. *As a practical matter, few professors will accept this added responsibility for very long or perform it conscientiously and well unless they have adequate training and receive appropriate rewards in the form of extra salary or added teaching credit*. Since competent writing is so important. The investment seems well worth the cost. (emphasis ours. Bok, 99).

Note: If you are a glutton for punishment and want to read the whole assessment report, it is **here**.

Anything You Want: Using Consumerism as a Lens in Teaching and Reading Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*

Scott R. Hall

> *I feel cheated. I feel let down and betrayed. What happened? I can't make sense of this; why is this story presented as a mystery if we aren't going to be given the ending. There are casualties, here: human, of course--Kathy, John, Private Weatherby, and also my sense of what a novel should be and should do for me—as the reader. All gone, all missing. Though I had been enchanted by the characters, the setting, and the mystery of it all, I still feel an absence. I sure had bought into the story; I was sure that John Wade was innocent. Sure, he had issues, but what fictionalized Vietnam War veteran didn't? Wasn't that the point of the story? He could still be my hero. He could find her. He could explain to her, to us, the truth and all could still turn out well.*

This is how I felt the first time that I read Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*. I must have missed some crucial piece of the story that would allow me to solve the mystery on my own. I needed a strategy the next time I read the book. I needed to read closer to the text, and leave some of my expectations behind. I needed to look for the story all through the text, and not wait for the story to complete itself at the end. I needed to read critically for details. I needed to bring myself to the text instead

of expecting the text to come to me. So, I put on my favorite baseball cap, listened to a little Buffalo Springfield (for what it was worth), and settled in.

What I found in that second read was much more detail, though even fewer answers. I was left with more questions and more doubts. And this time *I was sure* that John had done it. How can that happen? How can a novel offer two such very different readings back to back? And, if that was my experience, how on Earth was I supposed to teach this text to my students? And I was pretty stuck on the idea of teaching it. We already owned the books. The teacher before had taught it for several years. It was listed on the syllabus for the course. It was Tim O'Brien, a Minnesota writer. I had several good reasons to teach this text, but I knew that teaching this text was going to challenge me as much as reading it would challenge them. And that was a good feeling. I know now, having taught the text several times, that my students often react the same way; puzzled at first, they learn to read more critically, use lenses to make meaning, and adjust their expectations of the responsibilities of both the author and the reader.

The Setting, the Characters, and the Plot

"There's something happening here;
what it is ain't exactly clear"[1]

College in the Schools: Literature, a concurrent enrollment course through the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, is offered to high-performing juniors and seniors at Irondale High School, in New Brighton, MN, as the capstone honors literature course. For the past 15 years or so, Tim O'Brien's books have been central to the study of literature in this course. *In the Lake of the Woods* and *The Things They Carried* are often taught as a central part of the curriculum in CIS: Lit courses, which are offered throughout the Twin Cities metro area. CIS: Lit students

1 Like the Vietnam War, and now Iraq, history is not clear. Nor is O'Brien's text. Buffalo Springfield sang this song in response to the Vietnam War in "For What it's Worth."

read resistant, difficult, and culturally significant literature. I helped students understand and apply the tenets of critical theory, criticism, and lenses.[2] *In the Lake of the Woods* offers unique difficulties because of its complexity. Readers find history, evidence, footnotes, prose chapters, and several hypothesis chapters. It does not read like a normal mystery novel. However, this text is very appropriate for high school students, and using "consumerism," a tenet of postmodernism, is a viable strategy for reading and analyzing this text. Consumerism will give teachers a way to deal not only with the difficulty of the text, but address the thwarted expectations of students, and empower the diversity of opinion that often results from reading and discussing such a challenging text.

In the Lake of the Woods tells the story of John Wade as a child, soldier, spouse, candidate for public office, and a man dealing with love and loss. Wade loses his biological father at an early age: first, to alcoholism and, later, to suicide. As a soldier, he serves in the Vietnam War at its most brutal, and least heroic, time. His service climaxes with his involvement in the massacre at the villages of My Lai. When Wade returns from Viet Nam,[3]

2 Deborah Appleman (see bibliography) has been a frequent presenter at CIS: Lit workshops and MCTE conferences; her work has been pivotal in shaping workshops, discussions and best practices. At the end, I've included an appendix, with teaching activities that I've used in the classroom, and a bibliography to assist anyone wishing to teach this novel.

3 "Vietnam" and "Viet Nam" are often used to denote the same meaning, but they are not as interchangeable as that. They are synonymous in one regard: both terms refer to a geographical region, drawn by lines on a map or globe. Americans and the western world often use "Vietnam" to denote the country, the people, and the war. To the Vietnamese, Viet is a term that, historically, refers to a certain culture, or tribe, of people. Nam Viet is an ancient term, dating back to 208b.c.e, which refers to their summative community and culture, as much as to the geographical region they inhabited. Dai Viet (sometimes Dai Co Viet) refers to a kingdom, established in 967c.e. after Dinh Bo Linh achieved independence from China in battle. The use of the term Viet Cong and Viet Minh are specific to the military and revolutionary branches of Viet Nam's fight for independence. Viet Minh refers to the communist military branch, specifically of North Viet Nam, initiated and led by Ho Chi Minh. Viet Cong refers to the communist forces operating inside of South Viet Nam during the Vietnam War. Both of these terms still refer to the spirit or "enlightenment" of those involved, not just the government of North Viet Nam.

his relationship with Kathy is renewed and they wed shortly thereafter. Later, Wade runs for political office in Minnesota. Wade's history is told to us in flashbacks and memories; the "action" of the book begins on election night, 1986, with the news that Wade has lost his bid for a seat in the US Senate. Wade is left to sort out his future, outside of politics, and has to reassess every part of his past to make meaning of the present in order to move forward into the future. For the first time, perhaps, Wade is forced to face his life for what it is, authentically--not an ideal political role, or another shape that he can assume. He cannot become just another, politically attractive, copy. The ideal self, the simulacrum presented as the aesthetic, the one which Wade created for himself, no longer offers Wade a refuge from his past. Becoming the copy of a hero, or of a regular Joe, is common in politics today.

In the Lake of the Woods is America's story, as much as it purports to be Wade's. It is a quest for truth and, yet, John Wade's truth hides inside of a magician's trick, lies buried in a ditch in Viet Nam, and sinks under 100 feet of cold Canadian water. However, it is not only the quest for truth that drives our intense desire for comprehending this text—we also pursue the innate, consummate desire to "get something out of" our reading, as if there were a hidden grail to be achieved. But, O'Brien won't give us a straight story; he confounds the narrative flow with intratextual interruptions to the plot and character development. He disrupts our understanding by offering more than one way the story could have happened. He offers evidence that is uncertain, untrustworthy. Yet, we continue reading a text which at once invites us to the mystery and yet confounds our expectation for any satisfactory or even literal unveiling of the solution. Instead, the text offers us a partial history of Wade's failed quest for truth from a very foggy past. Our reading parallels this failure. O'Brien even tells the reader, clearly, that the truth will never be achieved by collecting evidence within the text: "Evidence is not truth. It is only evident . . . if you require solutions, you will have to look beyond these pages. Or read a different book (30). O'Brien is giving fair warning; there is no

controlling the text, here; readers will have to look elsewhere if they seek a singular and fabricated truth.

But *In the Lake of the Woods* offers far more to the reader than Wade's dramatized search for a lost father or the story of a veteran seeking redemption for thankless service in Viet Nam--it is also the story of how Wade mediates life experience through the postmodern architecture of *Consumerism*:[4] a philosophical mediation based upon cost/benefit analysis often used to describe "value" in capitalist markets (Jameson 197). Wade's attempt at understanding and creating the "meaning of his life" is dialectical: he wishes to efface any moral judgment or implication stemming from history (costs) that could mar his current reality (benefits) in the present. In the text itself, Wade applies this concept by using numbers and equations to express the "summative value" of his desire: his sense of responsibility to government; his loving feelings for his fiancé; his enduring memories of an alcoholic father; his overpowering guilt; his lust for escape from the negative experiences and emotions piled up in his unconscious mind. This text offers an intense study of character—and not only Wade's character, but the character of past and present history, past and current government, businesses and ventures, citizens and, most of all, the character of readers. To carry the argument to students, teachers must present the bare essentials of the connection of Consumerism to the war in Viet Nam.

4 I use the term "consumerism" as a flexible variant of Jameson's postmodern theory of late capitalism. He sees a radical distinction between the "option" of viewing late capitalism as a cultural dominant (aesthetic or stylistic), and of determining its moral implications, albeit indifferent to either a positive or negative outcome, historically. Simplified, I choose to understand Jameson's option as a choice between "what we accept because of what it looks like (appearance)" or "what we accept because of what it is (essence)." Other critical lenses parallel this dialectic of opposition: Freud's model of latent and manifest; surface and depth; authenticity and simulacra; alienation and inclusion; the signifier and the signified.

The Readers

"When you see the Southern Cross for the first time
You understand now why you came this way
'Cause the truth you might be runnin' from is so small
But it's as big as the promise, the promise of a comin' day"[5]

Like Wade, we also live in denial about the war in Iraq. We allow our government, our media, and ourselves the luxury to bury the horrifying events at My Lai, the real war, in favor of an ideal and aesthetic war, fought for freedom and democracy. The war in Iraq is a copy of the previous war, fought for the simulacra, rather than the authenticity of the event. Lest we forget our past, the Viet Nam War was fought for the sake of ensuring the survival of US Capitalism in Southeast Asia. After World War II, Viet Nam was split into two countries: North Viet Nam, which adopted the principles of Marxism for its ideology; and South Viet Nam, a country infused by Franco-European Capitalism. Although we often describe the South's leadership as democratic, the actual form of government only existed as much as its leaders promoted colonial style trade and allegiance to the Western Powers in Europe and the USA.

As the French involvement in Viet Nam's civil war lessened and America's grew, the doctrine fed to soldiers and the American public was one of stopping the spread of Communism—in effect, ridding the world of Evil. If we substitute Iraq for Viet Nam, and Terrorism for Communism, we have a nearly perfect simulacrum. The doctrine pushed by the US government and profiteering businesses promoted a culture of fear and hatred toward anything Marxist, Socialist or Communist, because of its inherent evil. The evil, of course, is in Communism's complete eradication of the ideals of Capitalist venture within the structure

5 Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young were not really singing about Viet Nam, but the Southern Cross. This constellation much talked about in Viet Nam memoirs, evokes an eerie image of leaving one hemisphere for the other, of life changing because of one's position on the globe of the world. The truth that Wade is running from could be the truth we all run from, though the sun continues to rise, and the new day begins.

of society, the use of natural resources, and the uses of labor.[6] Students may not have this background knowledge, or may only recognize some part of this story from American History courses which usually promote only the American Grand Narrative of "rescuing" the beneficial and free way of life that Communist North Viet Nam would sooner destroy. This is also the Grand Narrative that Wade "signs on" to fight for in Viet Nam.

Because of its unique approach to telling a war story (the one in Viet Nam *and* the one fought within John Wade), and its beguiling retelling of the American Grand Narrative of war, O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* has always intrigued me. My sense of logic is continually upbraided by the text's ambiguity, the author's muddy path towards resolution, the search for a truth that can never be rescued from the dark fog of guilt and forgetting. Yet, it also tickles my sense of possibility, not only in its story, but in *the way that the story unfolds*. The sense of possibility raised by the black words on the white pages. The sense of mystery at my fingertips, but elusive to the grasp. Upon each reading, I feel fundamental truth lurking somewhere behind the ink, and under the white of the page, waiting to be plucked or plumbed. Yet, after long inspection, the truth remains unknowable. The grail remains unachievable. The fallibility of my humanness, the lingering complaint of my curiosity, the deprived and depraved need of surety and truth in a story, becomes the constant weakness of my own character. I am left with the absence of feeling that I "got something out of" my reading, that my time and effort to read and analyze the text were somehow worthwhile. I want answers. I want instant gratification. Yet, this text constantly pushes back. The harder I try to control the

6 Several sources corroborate and debate the ideas in this paragraph. For a diversity of opinion, see *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* by Neil Sheehan (1989) and *Vietnam: A History* by Stanley Karnow (1983). Students may feel the need for a coherent narrative of the war; however, the opinions on the Viet Nam war are as varied as the opinions on politics today. What becomes truth depends much upon *who* gets to tell the story. Isn't it interesting that readers so desire a singular truth, as if there were such a thing, for questions concerning the past? And so desire individual choice and flexibility in the present?

text, the less cooperation I find. I have a hard time letting go and drifting along with the story, whether I understand the direction or not. Control is a common method of reading. My students are not unlike me in trying to control a text. When they cannot, they simply lose interest. The book is "no good."

I teach at Irondale High School, a medium sized school in the suburbs of the Twin Cities. We have several gifted students, or "customers," who elect to "buy our goods" by registering for honors courses. Most students choose literature courses because they enjoy the "consumption" of literature. And, after all my years of teaching, I can't recall just how many times, after assigning any literary text, I have heard students complain: "I don't like it. I hate it. I didn't get it. I don't understand what the author is trying to say. I don't get the author's point. Can't you just tell us what you want us to get out of this book? What's going to be on the test?" It all boils down to the same complaint: "I am not getting what I bargained for in reading this text." Students could just as well be saying, "I'm not getting my fair reward for spending time on this book." Even when students really enjoy reading, the reward often means "I want the author to do the work for me." It does not seem to matter whether the text is three pages long, three hundred, or a thousand—the reaction can be the same. The intensity of the reaction, however, seems to correlate with the amount of time and pages consumed in the effort to comprehend and understand the assigned material.

I hear this complaint far less when students choose their own books, which suggests that ownership of the "consumerist transaction" changes the engagement of the student during the process of consumption. For students, *to own* the task, or the responsibility, often creates its own consumerist meaning outside of the text. This meaning does not always correlate to our goals and outcomes, as teachers, when choosing literary works to use in our courses. When a teacher assigns a text, students' expectations should rise exponentially, not drop off.

These are typical feelings when students are assigned texts which resist inactive and complacent readers, such as Tim O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*. Even if the background

information is covered well, when the text is difficult or opaque, when the text pushes back, students rarely feel that they have received a fair payout—or gotten a good deal for trading their most precious commodity: time and effort. This reaction seems perfectly normal to me; these students have grown up in the age of Jameson's Late Capitalism, or what I will call Postmodern Consumerism. They are surrounded with images of buying power, or "buy-in" power. Advertising is full of it. Teachers even use this language in their planning and teaching: "how do we get students to 'buy into' this text?" The process students use to read and understand is intensively linked to their consumerist behavior and ideology. All behavior is transactional. All thinking is transactional. "If I do this, what do I get out of it? If I do what is required, will I get what I want?"

Outside education, this type of consumerism has direct linkage to our government's "selling" of the Vietnam and Iraq Wars to the American public. "Food for Oil" is a popular slogan—a pithy phrase which encapsulates an ideology that most Americans believe they understand without any further explanation. If I get something out of it, it's worth the time and expense. However, such simplistic transactional thinking, and brief mottos, short-circuits critical thinking; the ideology ceases to be original and authentic, and is instead replaced by "bumper sticker" simulacra, the casual acceptance of popular opinion in place of finding and expressing our own voices—finding refuge within the masses, instead of learning to think for ourselves. For teachers, this oversimplification of our goals for teaching students to read literature, as specified in the "buy in" type of planning, represents our wrong thinking. Teachers should help students understand their consumerist behavior, not cater to it.

Our students may not even be aware of their immediate, knee-jerk, consumerist reaction to the world. What students do know is their own very real, very physical involvement with currency, with work, with buying, with selling, and the power that comes with the right to purchase most goods for sale--as long as they have the required amount of time and money. They know that a free market economy offers choices, that there is power in

"ownership," and that ownership can be transferred. They know that there will always be more to buy, that goods have value even after they have been consumed, and that being a "good consumer" goes hand in hand with living in a "good economy." Economic stimulus checks, eBay, garage sales, taxes, user fees, sales, BOGO sales or 2-for-1 sales: examples surround us continually.

To our students, these concepts are not far removed from the ideologies that sent us to war—and, in fact, are an absolute part of freedom and democracy. In fact, talk of freedom and democracy usually clouds any individual's economic involvement in wars, or the economic support of unfriendly nations, by offering us less expensive choices at the market, or by placing the market in a context far removed from the source of goods--their own neighborhoods. These are the ideas that students carry forward in their process of reading, into the text of *In the Lake of the Woods*. There is plenty of fertile ground for discussion about how students perceive the very nature of their own ideals—including loss, war, marriage, love, politics—and how their behaviors help them to achieve these ideals or weaken their ability to carry them out.

A Consumerist Reading

"You can get anything you want at Alice's Restaurant"[7]

Without going on and on about the voodoo of economics, it is important to focus on the outcome of consumerist reading. When students read the material and then come to class and complain that they "didn't get anything out of it, the normal

7 *"Excepting Alice."* Arlo Guthrie's talking ballad, "Alice's Restaurant," is based upon a true story. This song tells the story of a young man answering to "the draft board." This became an anthem for hippies questioning our involvement in Viet Nam. It's interesting that the chorus lyric is consumerist—Guthrie is pointing out the absurdity of getting *"anything you want"* when the military draft required soldiers to "sign up--or else." In the song, Guthrie's persona tells listeners that he wants to go to Viet Nam, wants to "burn women, kids, houses and villages" and *"KILL, KILL, KILL!"* But, because the recruit has a criminal record (for littering) and may therefore lack moral character and fortitude, the army will not allow the recruit to join up.

reading transaction has failed. There is no paycheck for their working hours. This "consumerist transaction," involving both an input and an output, is a common expectation for our students. The transaction will go like this: Student A invests time to read the text; Student A makes the effort to comprehend and understand the text; Student A gains a reward. In mathematical terms, we can assign the value as a summation of the parts: x + y = z, where x is the time, y is the effort, and z is the reward. It is important to see the essence of the individual transaction as a "buy-in" and the reward results from the expectation from that buy-in. John Wade also uses this type of transaction to assess the value of his relationships, his career, and his father's love, which I'll discuss later.

Teachers also use consumerist ideals to help express our goals. But, from a teacher's viewpoint, what is the "buy-in"? What are we asking students to do? We ask them to value what we value. We are asking them to become citizens of our economic culture. We ask them to be "productive." We ask students to invest in ideals that may not be of their own choosing. Like taxes, or retirement accounts, or preventative maintenance on a car, we ourselves, perhaps, don't want to invest in these, but know we must to become and remain members of the consumerist community we must compete within. To ease the distaste, we often tell ourselves that these things are for our own good, that they create a better society in which to live, or that we are taking care of our own future.

Our students can be a tougher sell. With them, the buy-in is much different. We look for ways to hook *their* interest, *their* appreciation, *their* sense of value. But this is wrong thinking on our parts. Essentially, if we believe that students can be bribed by something that they value, for treading the waters of what we value, we are not asking them to buy in permanently. We are not giving them the skills to think for themselves, for the sake of learning, for the sake of curiosity. Consumerist behavior in teachers is a slippery slope; students only learn that the rewards for reading are external to the reading process itself.

Instead, teach them to read critically. Teach them to see

analytically. Do not give them the answers: teach them about themselves; teach them to think. Ask what they see in the text. Ask them to make connections. Show them your love of reading; don't bribe them with the film or free time at the end of class.

Students are asked to do work; the task is set. We may offer skills or ideas that give them power in the market place, whether that place is our classroom, on a test, in their own lives, or in their academic or work futures. Or we may offer something more immediate—free time, extra credit, or a passing grade. But students often see right through these attempts at bribery. They accept these offers, or not, based upon how much they value the consumerist transaction, and ultimately, upon *who they are*. Eleven-year-old John Wade certainly does see through, and still accept, the bribery of his father. Wade's father purchases John's affection with an offer to buy a magical item for him at Christmas. John, as a child, finds excitement and intense value in this because John is a consumer of magical items. During his visits to Karra's Studio of Magic, Wade sees the power that "magic" can offer, first through his sense of possibility at the purchase point of the items, and second, as the power of possibility that John can actually make magic happen—he can access a skill that he will use often in his future, making himself magically disappear.

There is a slight variation of the consumerist transaction. The input is Wade's collection of magic items, combined with the effort involved in his rehearsals in the basement in front of the mirror, and the reward is the power that magic can give him. John's transaction is documented in the prose chapters, when John and his father are Christmas shopping at Karra's, and in the evidence chapters through quotations from Robert Parrish's *The Magician's Handbook*. And this is another example of how O'Brien gives us a variety of views stemming from the variety of texts which he gives to the reader. Like Wade, students need to enter these texts, as well as that of the novel, in order to make meaning of the mystery.

The consumerist nature of the transactional formula oc-

curs when Wade's father tells John to buy "Anything you want . . . . Break the bank" (69). This transaction offers Wade a reward intrinsically different, a reward above the simple "money for goods" formula—this transaction offers John a chance at being a good son, perhaps, for putting up with his father's absences, alcoholic behaviors and abuses. This formulation is harder to chart out mathematically than the x + y = z equation above, and will look like this—John Wade puts in time physically as a son and understands his father and the ways in which he fits the definitions of "son"-- John understands how he is and isn't defined by his father (x); Wade expends effort practicing and understanding magic (y); the reward, in this case, is not only the goods, but how these magical goods can be used to both impress and abuse his father (z).

The bribery backfires; John sees through his father's trick and turns affection to disdain. The reward John chooses is the Guillotine of Death. He wants to perform the trick on his father's arm, to seemingly cut it off at the wrist. "Go on," the Carrot Lady says, "Let him have it" (71). John certainly receives a special reward from this transaction: the satisfaction of being in control, for once, of his father's emotions, instead of the other way around; a release, if even for a short time, from being controlled by his conflicted feelings for his father. Perhaps John wants to frighten or enrage his father, perhaps as payback for what his father has done to him. The text allows the reader to draw an individual conclusion concerning this power play, but by applying the transactional model, the reader acknowledges the dysfunctional relationship between father and son, acknowledges that what appears to be a kindness becomes a trigger for abuse. "Power: that was the thing about magic" (71). This consumerist relationship with his father becomes a hearkening to John Wade—and Wade later uses mathematics to describe his success and failure in politics and to illustrate and analyze his feelings about Kathy.

Politics are a risky business. So much depends upon public opinion as an indicator of success or failure. It's no secret that public opinion polls drive decisions at all political and social

levels, and no secret that politicians pay attention to polls as if they held the ultimate truth of life. Perhaps that is what attracts Wade to politics in the first place—give Sorcerer the chance to "cash in" on his service in Viet Nam, the chance to erase his history and magically change into the person he wants to become. For acceptance. For Wade, "politics was just a love thermometer. The polls quantified it, the elections made it official (55). Sorcerer uses his magic—and his mathematical formulas--which empirically express a rational truth that others consume and digest without trouble. Formulas can express a certain brand of factual truth, can entertain a certain "spin," without revealing true thoughts and feelings. "Politics *was* manipulation. Like a magic show: invisible wires and secret trapdoors" (35).

Political polls, at best, can reveal generality and uncover tendencies; yet these same polls often purport to offer solid evidence. However, polls rely upon a system of standard deviations, a margin of error that creates a shadow of uncertainty and leaves a place within the truth where secrets can hide. A place where, even if the numbers were right, the truth could still hide. A place, like My Lai, where majority rules, yet individual behavior can be hidden. A place where the killing of Weatherby is two stories, but one story falls into the shadows, magically disappears, within the standard deviation of the mean. Perhaps in this way, politics also offer Wade a refuge where tendencies can be counted on, and individual acts are submerged. Wade believes that he can be anybody, as long as others accept its truth—enough collective truth that he could abdicate individual responsibility—and become anybody he wants to be. Tony Carbo says that, for Wade, "politics and magic were almost the same thing for him. Transformations—" (27).

But the magic and shadows eventually betray Wade. Wade loses the primary by a landslide. A close political race is somehow worthy of respect, but a landslide is a complete and total consumerist ruin. What begins as a simple failure, a flawed formula, ends in a landslide failure, a complete erasure from both politics and love, and perhaps, a total landslide into the watery depths of nonexistence. The numbers do not lie; there are no

overlapping shadows to allow uncertainty, especially within the standard deviation. Losses may leave a bitter taste, but do not choke like a landslide. John and Kathy "pretended things were not so bad. The election had been lost, but they tried to believe it was not the absolute and crushing thing it truly was" (2).

Wade also uses mathematics to define the nature of his relationship with Kathy. John met Kathy in 1966. "The trick then was to make her love him and never stop" (32). When he can't trust love to last, he begins spying on her, stalking her. He needed to make sure that Kathy fit into his plan for life: "First law school, he told her, then a job with the party, and then, when all the pieces were in place, he'd go for something big. Lieutenant governor, maybe. The US Senate" (34). His desires are expressed through a series of mathematical equations: a + b + c + d=love and acceptance. It was magic, yet it was calculable, mathematically sound. Kathy wonders: "You've figured everything out, all the angles, but what's it *for*?"

"For us," he says. "I love you, Kath" (35).

Like a kid, John labels their love on her tennis shoe: "with a ballpoint pen he wrote on the instep: JOHN + KATH. He drew a heart around these words, tied the shoe to her foot" (60). Wade uses another mathematical equation to describe their love. Funny, though, Wade doesn't directly tell us what it equals, but usually the equation ends with =LOVE. In this case, we are left to speculate. These types of consumerist equations, the nature of the language that O'Brien uses, have great depth as tools to open up the text for us; we can use these consumerist metaphors to discuss the nature of our own feelings. What metaphor would I use to describe my own feelings of love? How would I "sum up" the goals for my own life? Like Wade, do metaphors offer us some kind of magic, or the language of magic, to make our desires come true?

Wade finds other ways to describe their love while he is in Viet Nam. He "compare[s] their love to a pair of snakes he'd seen along the trail, in Pinkville, each snake eating the other's tail" (61). Wade hypothesizes that if the snakes continue eating each other, the "mathematics get weird" and this mathematical

strangeness can be captured by this sublime formula: "one plus one equals zero" (61). What at first seems flirtatious in Wade's letter home to Kathy, silly lover's talk or nonsensical romanticism, becomes a sort of consumerist mantra for Wade. In later letters home from Viet Nam, Wade continues to reference these snakes as an intense, operative metaphor for their love. In a strictly consumerist rendering, though, this mathematical formula does not compute.

The result of Wade's formula is zero; unless we are missing the meaning of "zero," there appears to be no reward. Is it possible that Wade sees their love, not as consumerist, but as something that cannot be bought by or sold to the highest bidder? Or bedder? Or flatterer? Or Sorcerer? Is it possible that the computation of time plus effort can result in no reward and still be satisfactory? At the core, there is a sublimity to be discovered; perhaps love cannot be described in mathematical terms, no matter how many times Wade repeats this formula. Perhaps he seeks no reward from his efforts. But this is not in keeping with the Wade whose every move is calculated to get him elected to the US Senate, to get him married to Kathy, to cover up or remove any record of his involvement in My Lai. And, calculated enough, toward the end of the novel, to remove any record of his connection with Kathy's disappearance, or perhaps even to remove him from his own life? At the end of it all, Wade is a casualty of faulty mathematics, a broken narrative, a buried truth, and a sunken confidence in his ability to change anything.

A Final Assessment

"And, in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make."[8]

We will never know more than what is in the text. And that is reason enough to use this text with our students. We can

8 Is it really? What would Wade have said about this equation? Or Kathy? Perhaps even the Beatles recognized the consumerist nature of love. This lyric appears at the end of "The End" on *Abbey Road*.

only rely on the tools we bring into the text, to open up the mystery. We can only rely on the possibilities we generate as individuals, as a class, as a community. There is a reason why Wade focuses so heavily upon the zero in this equation. And we must speculate on the nature of numbers to truly describe emotions. This formula has merits as a metaphor—a metaphor that hints at the truth—but this formula is a metaphor for failure, not for love or success. The formula is flawed from the beginning. The math does not work. The numbers do not compute. And, in many ways, Wade is a zero, to us. As the narrator says, "John Wade—he's beyond knowing. He's an other." No matter how much we crave to know Wade, or know one another, it is prone to failure. to "penetrate by hypothesis, by daydream, by scientific investigation those leaden walls that encase the human spirit, [they] define it, and guard it, and hold it forever inaccessible . . . Our lovers, our husbands, our wives, our fathers, our gods—they are all beyond us" (101).

Yet, there is value in considering this formula further, but not for Wade's or Kathy's sake. If we consider our consumerist students, and apply this formula to the *process* they use to read text, the formula can be used to describe feelings that students may encounter when their time and effort comes to naught at the end of the text—when they never find out "whodunit." There is no reward for reading the text as a mystery, as a story, as a way to discern reality at the conclusion. "1 + 1 = 0" leaves them empty of compassion for Wade, for Kathy, for O'Brien--and for me for assigning such a text. However, when the formula for the normal reading process is thwarted, the greater reward is possible. Who hasn't learned more from mistakes? Who hasn't discovered something important along the road not taken?

Often, students are disappointed that O'Brien does not give them a viable, logical answer to the mystery. "What happened?" They are less than satisfied. I ask them, "What do you think happened?" The answers are varied: I don't know. I think he did it. I think they went away to Verona. I think she drowned. He lets himself die because he feels guilty for not protecting her. Kathy escapes, but John dies. And my consol-

ing does little good to those who feel cheated. When I tell them, "this book is about *you*," their looks betray their disgust with my answer. I try again. "If you think Wade did it, that is *who you are*. If you choose to believe they made it to Verona, *that is who you are*."

Although some students see the possibilities, ready to give anything a go, it still comes up zero. The buy-in that teachers often crave results in null. But all is not lost, for in that nullity lies an essential lesson, not only in literary terms, but in *who they are*. The discussion can turn away from the author, or the characters, and focus on students--as readers and consumers. We have the chance to teach them something that they can use in every arena of their lives. To me, it is the English teacher's Holy Grail, to teach them an essential truth transcending literature, a truth never to forget, not facts or lies that they will never use again after the final test. They read themselves as much as they read the novel. Perhaps, it could be stated as such: "the meaning that you take is equal to the meaning that you make."

Turning aside from Wade, the focus can be brought to capitalism and our Grand American Narrative of consumption and *how that affects how we value stories and the way we read literature*. Few students feel that a zero sum transaction is advantageous in a free market world, whether we are talking about reading, relationships, or the summation of goods or ideas. To get something for nothing is a good deal, but to get nothing for something is simply ridiculous to a consumer. And I do mean ridicule is the natural outcome. In a scene from *Forrest Gump*, Forrest spends thousands of dollars on a barely seaworthy shrimping boat. Even the seller sees a disconnect between the boat's value and the extremely high price Gump is willing to pay. The seller replies, "Are ya' stupid or something?" Gump does not see the zero sum formula at work, though we do. He pays too much for the boat, and the formula turns into a great loss. We laugh. But, through the magic of story, Gump actually ends up a billionaire precisely because of his ignorance and that lopsided transaction. It is ironic, the great literary equalizer. Forrest Gump only sees the reward and does not understand the

summative values; he does not understand life through consumerist principles.

But students fail to see reward in their own lives when it is not immediate. They have a hard time recognizing their own role in the post-modern consumerist economic reality that we inhabit. They are not fully fledged members of the economic reality that is America. Unless the discussion is fruitful, and focuses on their reality, reading O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods* can be a failure, a zero sum. Students will quickly lose interest, respect, and motivation. But, by recognizing their role in reading this text, students can reap much more from their experience. O'Brien continually reminds readers of their role in this text. And, in terms of teacher planning, goals and outcomes, losing readers does not compute in the classroom.

If we use this consumerist principle to describe our students, then this transaction must describe not only their active intuition concerning priorities in their lives, but also their unconscious desires. Many students will accept assignments without groaning, and some fully look forward to the challenge and reward that comes with such work. When assigning O'Brien's text, I am acutely aware that the text may not offer that great reward at the end, in the usual way, but the challenge is worthy—even though the author hauntingly dismisses the possibility of such a reward as *full comprehension and understanding*. O'Brien's narrator alerts readers to the idea that the mystery may never be solved through reading this book. At the bottom of page 30, the narrator tells us that "Kathy Wade is forever missing, and if you require solutions, you will have to look beyond these pages. Or read a different book."[9] What kind of a mystery novel offers no solution at the end of the book? Why does O'Brien seem to sabotage the suspense, and his seeming intention of delivering a

9 One incredibly rich exception to this experience is the reader who refuses to read all the footnotes, or perhaps skips the evidence chapters altogether believing they are erroneous to the story. Some students have told me of having to go back and read the skipped evidence chapters after seeing them subsequently appear in later chapters and realizing their integral role in the story.

mystery? Everything in this text casts an accusing finger back towards the reader.

By using the consumerist formula in class discussions, the empty experience of the reader can be mediated and described. One plus one equals zero. If a student puts in the time, and the effort, and no reward is forthcoming (the zero sum effect), that student may feel disappointed by the text, may feel they missed something and, therefore, the time and effort were wasted on an insolvable text, or worse, may feel that the entire reading process was "not worth their time and money." Do we really want our students associating a lack of value with reading? With the meaning of literature? With the meaning of life?

When using resistant texts in the classroom, and it is necessary to do so, it is a teacher's responsibility to help students work through their feelings of being unrewarded, especially when students are demanding and academically focused. Grade is always a consideration; but, notwithstanding, students are also disappointed in the teacher, *in you*, for assigning such a seemingly empty task. Helping them understand their consumerist tendencies, the input and output of the transaction (of reading in this case), softens their initial feelings of having wasted time, wasted effort, and gives them a sense of reward. We must help them understand what they get out of resistant texts, and perhaps all texts: *themselves*. That is the most important knowledge we can give them. An understanding of why they feel this way mediates negative feelings, mediates the post-modern principles at work in their everyday lives, and allows teachers a forum to introduce the higher outcomes of reading any text—the power of story, the power of the printed word, the power of communication, the power to see through the post-modern reality they inhabit, and, most importantly, to realize that the power resides within their own hands.

Hopefully, by accepting that power and the responsibility that comes with it, students reading any resistant text, fiction or other, won't rely so heavily upon the author, or narrator, to do their work for them. I believe O'Brien, in all sublimity, would certainly agree with that sentiment. Besides, given the anonym-

ity of O'Brien's narrator, why should we trust him? Why should we trust anyone, whom we have never met, and know so little about, to tell us anything resembling truth? We should never purchase a used car without kicking the tires a few times, so why are we so disappointed when O'Brien's narrator turns out to be selling us a lemon of a story? Ask students to kick the tire a few times. Ask them to open the hood, run their fingers along the underbody, and check the fenders for rust or new paint. Uncover whatever truths they can find before making a decision. Our job, in working with this text, is to show students that the math does not always compute--not in this text and not in this life. Teach them that rewards can be accessed through analyzing the derivatives within the equation, without even waiting for the computation.

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Appendix: Teaching Activities

So, what can teachers do in the classroom to help students see themselves in this text? Below are several activities I have used with students while studying this text. I won't claim that these activities will work for you, but each served a specific purpose within my classroom. I am, of course, lucky to have a very collaborative team of teachers to work with in my building.

And, I am indebted to all the teachers and professors who have helped me along the way to becoming the intellectual risk-taker that I am today.

1) Ask Students to Write Daily Journals

It is essential that students keep a journal during their reading. Any kind of journal is helpful, whether it be the two column journal, Cornell notes, or any other such structure. About half the time I ask them to respond to specific topics or questions. Students should record their thoughts, jot out any clues, which help them understand the text, or write about themselves and address reading behaviors that feed their reading process. I tend toward Reader Response when assigning or working with journals in the classroom. One of my favorite journals is to ask students to describe the place where they usually read. Often, it is their bedroom, late at night, TV or Radio on, a low watt reading lamp, and while texting on their cell phone. That is a great place to start talking about lenses. And with this text, any start is a good start. You can't ask too specific a question. Students will have something to offer. And journals help students prepare for class discussions. I usually start class discussions with five minutes of "journal-sharing." Students share journals with each other before the discussion gets going. It provides ample ammunition for the discussion at large.

2) Read Interviews with Tim O'Brien

Several are available, but not all are helpful. Be wary: O'Brien can be just as cryptic, literarily, in an interview, lecture or essay, as in his novels. He has been known to tell a story to his audience or interviewer that may digest as truth, yet it is not. It may be another of his metaphoric fictions, designed *to bring us* to our truth, not necessarily to reveal his own. I would suggest starting with these three sources, which particularly connect to his Viet Nam novels and his experiences during that time in his life. These sources are fully cited in the Bibliography below:

"The Magic Show" is an essay that directly examines O'Brien's craft and the nature of fiction and mystery in any text.

Although O'Brien makes several comments on the inability of ever discovering the truth, this article can be applied to *In the Lake of the Woods* because its central metaphor--that creating fiction is the act of creating a magic show--is useful to students as an analytical tool and as a primary tool to assess the nature of truth in any text, fiction or not. O'Brien plumbs the paradox that "there is something both false and trivial about a story that arrives at absolute closure." In other words, perhaps we shouldn't trust any story that wraps up easily and completely, leaving no questions in its wake.

"The Vietnam in Me" is essentially autobiographical. This article was released on the eve of the publication of *In the Lake of the Woods* and reveals "the truth" of O'Brien's service in Viet Nam: the lingering pain, the post-traumatic stress, the anxiety, loneliness, and despair. "You don't have to be in Nam to be in Nam" seems to sum up his main point. Students will find this article to help them understand the responsibility of history to reveal truth.

"Writing Vietnam" is a lecture. This particular piece is noteworthy because of O'Brien's bold paradoxical statement that all fiction writing, even when it purports to be autobiographical, is for "getting at the truth when the truth isn't sufficient for the truth." O'Brien develops two components for creating truth in history for our modern society. Besides documenting historical truth, there is a need to develop the sensation *that one was actually there*, and this can be accomplished through narrative fiction. The past can strike as forcefully in the present when the reader feels the authentic experience, the sense that some answers and truths may never be discovered. Therefore, *In the Lake of the Woods* cannot conclude as a story, but must continue because it is no longer the story of John Wade; it is our story.

3) Learn About the History and the War in Viet Nam

Our history textbooks do not do the job when it comes to this war. I would start by educating yourself, as teacher. You need to take the lead. Watch films, but not necessarily the fictionalized films such as *Casualties of War*, or *Platoon*, but these

films can open up a window for students on what war might be like. Instead, go to the news reel type films created by the History Channel, by American News Network Television, or by organizations outside of the United States for a more objectified version of the truth as presented. The Internet is full of websites, interviews, and electronic sources about the Vietnam War. Selected bibliographies for Tim O'Brien are also plentiful. Many of the sources that I mentioned above are available on the web. Some, however, such as the *New York Times*, require accounts and/or subscriptions.

I would like to point out one consideration. Our students (and some of our teachers) have had very little coursework in the Vietnam War era of history. I would suggest having students do some background reports or class presentations on the Viet Nam war era prior to reading any of O'Brien's Vietnam War books: *In the Lake of the Woods*, *The Things They Carried*, *If I Die in a Combat Zone*, or *Going After Cacciato*. I've previously cited two sources in a previous footnote that teachers should consult. There are several good memoirs available, as well, from both soldiers and citizens, from the United States and from Viet Nam. Several works of fiction are also available.

One book, later made into a riveting film, is excellent: *Dear America: Letters Home from Vietnam* (1985). The film was released in 1988 and is readily available for purchase and rental online.

Students may also be interested in the vocabulary and slang used in the Vietnam War. Note: some of the language is coarse. This link will bring them to it: http://www.vietvet.org/glossary.htm

Here is a link to a pretty complete history lesson plan, developed by students: http://www.wisd.us/departments/histgrant/Lesson%20Plans/vietnam.htm

4) Give Students Criticism to Read

Start with O'Brien's works, but continue giving theory and lens work to students. Deborah Appleman's text (cited below) has been invaluable. Any lens will work, but I tend to use

Reader Response to open up discussions early in the semester, and rely on that lens to open up the text in their journals and in our earliest discussions. Then, later in the semester, and later in each novel unit, I move away from Reader Response toward Structuralist, Deconstruction, Genderist, and Postmodernist lenses. Timothy Melley's work on trauma and historical forgetting (cited below) was also indispensible to understanding O'Brien's Vietnam War novels.

5) Invite Speakers in to Your Classroom

It is quite possible that your students have relatives who served in the war, either as a soldier in the US Armed Services or the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam. There are also many civilians from America or Viet Nam who have stories to tell. However, make sure you talk to any potential speakers before they enter your classroom and face the students and their questions. The Vietnam War was very emotional for those who served and for those who were affected by it, personally. If you have no connections, contact veterans groups in your city or state. Many of these groups have speakers who are experienced at speaking to groups and are willing to come to your school and talk to students. To start, you may want to contact the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), the American Legion, or your statewide Vietnam Veterans group. Most of these organizations can be found in the phone book or on the web.

6) Visit "The Wall"—Virtually, in Your Classroom

Look at this link: http://www.vvmf.org.

This link has information and promos for a well made film which tells the history of the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial: http://www.smithsonianchannel.com/site/smithsonian/show_remember_vietnam.do

Look for films about the wall. This is our lasting connection to those soldiers whose "certain blood was being shed for uncertain reasons," as O'Brien puts it in "Writing Vietnam." This one is particularly interesting and tells about artifacts left at the wall by visitors: *Letters to the Wall: A Documentary on the*

Vietnam Wall Experience (2002).

7) Bring in Songs and Pop Culture from that Era

Some students know the music from the sixties and seventies, but few realize the connection with the war and the peace movement. It's sometimes shocking for students to see that "The Ballad of the Green Berets" reached the number one spot on the Billboard Charts for five weeks in 1966, the same year that "Alice's Restaurant" was released. I've used songs as subtitles within my paper, but there are many that protest our involvement in Viet Nam: some use metaphors, and some are outright hostile about the effects of the war on our culture. Ask students to make these connections to O'Brien's text. There are also films that use music from this era; *Apocalypse Now* (directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 1979) is one of the best examples. To illustrate some of the differences between the peace movement then and now, ask students to bring in songs that protest our involvement in Iraq. You can even ask students to write a protest song.

Two examples of pop culture items from this time are POW bracelets and Zippo brand cigarette lighters. Both are well documented on the web. POW bracelets are still available through veterans groups, and include soldiers from all modern wars as well. The bracelets have names of MIAs or POWs inscribed upon them. Once the soldier was returned, the wearer was supposed to mail the bracelet to the family of the soldier. Zippo lighters are still highly collectible—especially if they are engraved with a soldier's military insignia and branch or area of service during the war. Besides being used to light cigarettes (many soldiers smoked), Zippo lighters were collected by soldiers for "Zippo Missions"—which were Search and Destroy missions which ended by using Zippos to set fire to the thatched straw roofs of huts in villages that were deemed unfriendly. Later in the war, Zippos became associated with marijuana and hashish use among disheartened troops. Civilians have since been the main collectors of Zippo lighters.

The entire "peace sign" phenomena are also well documented on the web. Whether it was a round symbol with an

upside down, three pronged "Y" inscribed inside, or a dove, or the image of a hand with the first two fingers extended into the air, the sign has been around for a long time. There are several sites that describe the history of the peace symbol, and several commercial sites catering to the "modern peace crowd."

8) Read Other Works by Tim O'Brien

I've already called out the need to bring the "real" Tim O'Brien into the discussion, but using his other works of fiction as a springboard into the novel can offer a litmus test to his craft: a source where we can talk about intertextuality. When I first taught *In the Lake of the Woods*, it was the only piece by O'Brien on the syllabus. So, I gave them a chapter of O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*: "How to Tell a True War Story." This chapter/short story gave us a way to test the truth as it pertains to the soldier who has seen action, and it also gave us another piece of O'Brien to bring to the table. The second year I taught CIS: Lit, I required both novels. We read *The Things They Carried* before reading *In the Lake of the Woods* and their background knowledge of the war increased, their understanding of Wade was much more comprehensive, and our discussions and questions were far better.

I suggest to students that they read O'Brien's other war novels, *If I Die in a Combat Zone* and *Going After Cacciato*, but few have that much extra time during the semester. One more short piece about craft, which I suggest you read, if not your students, is "The Things That Writers Carry" (see below for citation). It's interesting to hear the intentionality of O'Brien in bringing a sense of truth to the reader, as well as to himself, through these novels.

9) Hold a Trial

To culminate our discussions and analysis, I ask students to hold the criminal trial of John Wade. This trial itself takes about two hours during a single class period, or over the course of two, but the activity takes about one week to prepare. First, at least 3-4 days ahead of the trial, help students formulate the exact

crime(s) of which Wade is guilty and make sure the entire class understands the charge(s). Next, ask students to gather textual evidence as homework or during class discussions. Separate students into a prosecuting team and a defense team about 2-3 days before the trial is held in class. Note cards are preferable, but they can use their texts during the trial. The goal is to have students using the text to present certainties to the court; however, there aren't that many certainties in the text, so it becomes very challenging to prove anything during the court sessions.

The day before the trial, I ask each team to identify 2-3 students to be the leads for each team. This small group meets to discuss the charges and how the defense will plead. The remaining team members act as witnesses (and better know their parts well if they don't want to be embarrassed by their well-read peers) to be called to the stand for examination and cross examination. I am usually the judge but a student, having the ability to maintain order and rules, would be preferable. I then tell them that the prosecution will begin with opening arguments and the defense can respond (3 minute limit each). Then, the trial can begin, the prosecution calling witnesses and the defense crossing them. Most students have seen court proceedings, on television or in films, and know how it goes. While there are no time limits, the judge may need to keep the questioning focused and on target. Having extra students, who don't have a specific role to play, serve as the jury is an option if there are enough students in class. When that is the case, I ask the jury to deliberate in a "Socratic circle" (for information on Socratic circles, see http://www.stenhouse.com/pdfs/0394ch01.pdf).

At the end of the trial I ask students to write a secret ballot to see if anyone is convinced, without a reasonable doubt, of Wade's guilt. I also assign a journal which is three-pronged: they analyze how their reading process has changed; they define their role as a reader; and they discuss what their final truth is, and whether or not that truth is discoverable, within this novel.

Through Another Looking Glass: Helping Students See Themselves in O'Brien's *In the Lake of the Woods*

Melissa Brandt

The exact moment I first heard the words of Tim O'Brien, I was in an English class in the eleventh grade at Worthington Senior High School in Worthington, Minnesota. Darren Bauman, a senior, sat in front of me and wore t-shirts with the days of the week printed on the back. I remember Darren's t-shirts because, well, Darren was as cute as a button—if "cute as a button" means you imagine yourself kissing him every day of Advanced English in the eleventh grade. Needless to say, he made it difficult to concentrate in class.

During one of my Darren daydreams, my teacher, Mrs. Ellen Copperud, opened *The Things They Carried* and started reading. As she turned the pages, her words drifted in and out of my consciousness like a jigsaw puzzle replacing bits of Darren's chestnut hair, dark eyes, and daily t-shirts with O'Brien's weighted descriptions, vivid images, and troubled thoughts, until the Darren puzzle faded into the background, and O'Brien's words became the completed portrait in my mind. My crush for Darren was supplanted with the love I felt for Tim O'Brien's linguistic magnetism. I never looked back. Mrs. Copperud explained to us that Tim O'Brien had attended the very same school that we were attending. A mere twenty years earlier, he sat in our classrooms, looked at our walls, and walked our hallways.

Tim O'Brien and I have more in common than grow-

ing up in the same small town. We share a space intertwined with memories of similar places and events. I know the smell of the public library where O'Brien spent his Saturdays as a boy. I've been to the Annual Turkey Day Parade, the same parade he mocks in his novels. I've sat in the bleachers near the baseball diamond where he played little league. We share history and, because of our history, it is difficult for me not to interact with a book like *In the Lake of the Woods* in a more visceral way than the general reader.

He describes our shared hometown: "The settlers must have seen endless plains and eased their bones and said, 'Here as well as anywhere, it's all the same.' The town became a place for wage earners. It is a place for wage earners today—not very spirited people, not very thoughtful people" (*If I Die* 13). Not a very flattering portrayal. Because of his coldness toward Worthington, when I read *In the Lake of the Woods*, my tendency is to react both bitterly, with the desire to protect my small town upbringing, and with irony, because, like O'Brien, I will never move back.

In the Lake of the Woods is a novel in which the main character, John Wade, the Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota, was running for the US Senate when it is discovered that he participated in the My Lai Massacre in Vietnam. He and his wife, Kathy Wade, travel to northern Minnesota to escape the press after the embarrassing political defeat. After a few days at the lake, Kathy disappears. The novel revisits John and Kathy's lives together, reviews the evidence associated with Kathy's disappearance and John's disturbing past, and invents different hypotheses on what may have happened to Kathy Wade.

Although the main storyline of the novel is fiction, O'Brien has admitted that *In the Lake of the Woods* is his "most personal" text (*Tim O'Brien* 3). *In the Lake of the Woods* includes intimate details of O'Brien's home life as a child, frightening revelations of his relationship with his father, and historical connections to the real life events he experienced in the war. These connections and the idea that a text of fiction can be part autobiography are nothing new to the literary world. Many texts

of fiction use elements of myth, history, and biography; but there are fictional texts that combine these elements into something more: biomythography.

The poet Audre Lorde coined the term biomythography in an attempt to create a new genre of writing. Her book, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, explores each of the elements of myth, history, and biography and creates a new life for the author. Since Lorde's creation of the concept, biomythography has taken on a development of its own. Professor Edward Warburton from the University of California defines biomythography as:

> Made up of myth, history, and biography, all the ways in which we perceive the world around us. It is a term that describes the strategy for writing down the meanings of identity within the structure of personal, social, cultural and historical life. The process of biomythography takes the form of multiple media outside the conventional literary structures of autobiography, such as choreography, film, music, playwriting, poems, slide show, short story, video, etc. In short, biomythography teases out the layerings [sic] of differences within the individual subject as they write their material world. It is a way to view myth as much a part of history as is historical fact; to intertwine the two, creating a new understanding of mythic and historical personalities; to (re)create yourself not so much by a chronological reading of events and people (real and imagined) from your life, as it is by theme, image and sound; to establish an identity as you would have yourself be read. (Warburton)

In some ways *In the Lake of the Woods* is by definition the opposite of Professor Warburton's explanation of biomythography. O'Brien does not claim the novel runs parallel to his own life. He is not seeking out a new identity through his characters in the way that Audre Lorde has done. He is, however, intertwining myth, biography, and history to create a new perception of "mythic and historical personalities." His goal, unlike that of authors like Lorde who wish to create a new biography, is to push readers into a re-examination of history, which includes a re-examination of elements of autobiography. More than this, he seems to be pushing us to an examination of

how and where history is created and constructed, both within our minds and within our world.

For the purpose of this article, I will be examining O'Brien's text by breaking down the individual elements of biomythography. I will first examine the biography of the novel, sifting through each chapter for the moments that relate directly to O'Brien's life. O'Brien claims this novel is his most personal for a reason. He includes an anonymous narrator-biographer in the story that sounds mysteriously like O'Brien himself. O'Brien uses the narrator-biographer to interject thoughts, opinions, and beliefs on how he perceives the unfolding aspects of the story. Although he rarely allows the narrator-biographer to interject thoughts when he discloses personal moments of his real life past, there are many real life revelations contained in the narrator's footnotes, creating a parallel text with disturbing connections to the material within the primary text. And while O'Brien would argue "that ultimately questions related to facts about his life and the factual consistency or inconsistency of characters and events in his books—all happening-truths—are insignificant and should not interfere with readers' enjoying and identifying with his works" (Herzog 896), the factual consistency and inconsistencies add another layer of complexity to the novel that merits exploring.

Second, I will be examining the elements of myth within the novel. When dissecting the fictional character John Wade, I intend to focus on Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth. O'Brien's text meets several of Campbell's elements required of a traditional hero, but a few of these elements are subverted by creating a hero that can never truly come home. Contrary to Campbell's definition, I will also examine the myth of politics. When I use the term myth in breaking down the political figures in the novel, it will not be under the umbrella of Campbell's monomyth. When I refer to the "myth" of politics, I am commenting on the falsehoods that politicians often present to the world in order to maintain the love of the country.

Next, I will examine the historical elements of the novel. O'Brien presents historically documented incidents within

alternating chapters, titled "Evidence," in which he weaves medical histories of his fictional characters and actual quotes from historical figures. He defends this approach to fiction and "narrative deceit as an effective technique for introducing listeners to the complex intermingling of facts, fiction, truth, lies, memory, and imagination" (Herzog 895). For this section of the article, I will take a look back at historical documents and literature printed regarding the Vietnam War.

Finally and most importantly, I will investigate how each of these elements could be developed and applied to teaching the text in an English classroom. I intend to explore short stories, films, and novels that could be read alongside *In the Lake of the Woods*, as well as opportunities for academic and creative assignments that will expand student knowledge of biography, myth, and history. But first, let's explore O'Brien's biography.

Section I: O'Brien's Biography: A Riddle Wrapped in an Enigma

Tim O'Brien is rarely straightforward about his life. For example, Tobey C. Herzog begins his book with an anecdote relevant to O'Brien's experience in the war. Herzog recalls an incident during a book tour with O'Brien in which, when presenting an address to a group including some Vietnam Veterans, O'Brien shared a personal war story:

> O'Brien first described his summer of 1968, the time immediately after his graduation from college and subsequent receipt of a draft notice. He recounted his growing moral dilemma: whether to avoid induction by fleeing to Canada or serve his country by entering the army. The conflict culminated in his trip to the Rainy River, which forms part of the border between Minnesota and Canada, where O'Brien would decide his future. O'Brien continued his story with such detail and emotion that the listeners who were unfamiliar with his novels became hooked—emotionally drawn into Tim O'Brien's life…At the end of his storytelling, O'Brien paused as the Wabash audience nodded knowingly at the story's end: Tim O'Brien had decided to enter the army and to fight—and not to flee across the river into Canada. But then O'Brien confessed: The story was made up. (Herzog 1)

Parts of O'Brien's war story were true. He did consider crossing the border to Canada and avoiding the draft. He echoes these thoughts in his memoir *If I Die in a Combat Zone: Box Me Up and Ship Me Home*. In *If I Die*, he actually called for airline schedules from boot camp: "I called the Seattle airport and checked on fares to Dublin, Ireland. Playing it carefully, professionally, I inquired first with one of the large American firms, telling them I was a student and wanted to do research overseas" (*If I Die* 54). The rest of the story is false.

As a writer, O'Brien is fond of obscuring the path of reality by way of fiction. He uses the confusion as a tool in his real life as well. He often claims something to be true in an interview only to deny it later, which is important for a writer like O'Brien because part of his goal "as a writer is to be 'read by the centuries'—but not as a war writer. He bristles at this narrow label often pinned on him: 'It's like calling Toni Morrison a black writer or Shakespeare a king writer'" (*Tim O'Brien* 23). By giving his audience access to himself through fiction, he leaves it to the reader to find and sort out which experiences are mythical, which experiences are historical, and which experiences are biographical, and although it is not necessary to know the complete history and life of any author, it is helpful in understanding how the author's perspective shaped the narrative.

In the novel, *In the Lake of the Woods*, John Wade struggles with his alcoholic father's verbal abuse. When discussing his father, O'Brien remarks he "was 'an alcoholic, bad alcoholic, institutionalized a couple of times; his alcoholism hurt me deeply'" (*Tim O'Brien* 8-9). As in the novel, O'Brien found that "dinners were an especially difficult time for O'Brien. His father would sometimes begin drinking after work and 'by the time dinner came around he would be sullen and way inside himself and the man that I loved and adored, the charming, stylish guy had vanished….I felt that I was never good enough for him, could never please him no matter what I accomplished. And to this day I still don't understand what it was that didn't please him'" (*Tim O'Brien* 9).

During these times, O'Brien's father berated Tim about

his weight and love of magic; the exact same topics became issues for John Wade, *In the Lake's* main character, and his father in the novel:

> That summer when John was eleven it got to where I [John's Mother] didn't have any choice. The drinking just got worse and worse. His father would be down at the American Legion all afternoon and half the night. Finally I got up the nerve to check him into the state treatment center up north. I hate to say it, but it was a relief to have him out of the house. John and I, we both could have supper without sitting there on the edge of our seats…everything would be better now. It wasn't, though. It never got much better. (*In the Lake* 99)

O'Brien's father was institutionalized for his drinking in the same fashion as Wade's: "He describes an occasion when his father, who was O'Brien's little league coach, was institutionalized at midseason…He was uneasy about the players' opinions of him and his father, and he hesitated to tell the team the truth about the situation" (*Tim O'Brien* 9). The hospitalization of his father was a fact then and the difficulty O'Brien had in telling the truth is accurate even today and is a problem that many people in American society are able to relate to.

Another example from the text mirroring O'Brien's own struggle states, "John loved his father a lot. I suppose that's why the teasing hurt him so bad…things were hard for John. He was too young to know what alcoholism is" (*In the Lake* 10). O'Brien seems to be attempting to sort out some of the frustration he felt with his father's alcoholism through his novel. He uses historical references as emphasis and as comparison to these moments. O'Brien uses quotes from Woodrow Wilson's biography to reflect the state of mind of his main character and of himself: "Another cousin, Jessie Bones, recalled a typical instance of Dr. Wilson's 'teasing.' The family was assembled at a wedding breakfast. Tommy [Woodrow] arrived at the table late. His father apologized on behalf of his son and explained that Tommy had been so greatly excited at the discovery of another hair in his mustache that morning that it had taken him longer to wash and dress" *(In the Lake* 195). This same teasing

is reflected in the novel, ("He was not a fat child, not at all. He was husky. He had big bones…His father teased him quite a lot. Constant teasing, you could say") (*In the Lake* 10), and in his personal life, ("William would taunt and tease young Tim—about his weight and his disgusted response to his father's drinking") (*Tim O'Brien* 9).

The idea of teasing about his chubbiness and his interest in magic appears again and again: "'I wasn't fat,' he said, 'I was normal….And I didn't jiggle. Not even once. I just didn't'" (*In the Lake* 75) and "His father would jerk a thumb at the basement door. 'That pansy magic crap. What's wrong with baseball, some regular exercise?' He'd shake his head. 'Bubbly little pansy'" (*In the Lake* 67). The reader feels the sad state and the effects of alcohol and verbal abuse of a father on both the main character and the author.

In the novel, Wade's father commits suicide. O'Brien's father did not, but the physical and emotional absences could be felt regardless of whether or not the man was dead; in fact, the absences "created moments of self-consciousness for O'Brien" (*Tim O'Brien* 9). O'Brien's anger is present in the novel and in his real life to the extent that fact and fiction begin to blur. When discussing his own life, O'Brien says, "I don't know if it is just Americans—I doubt it—or just Midwestern Americans—I doubt it—but for the men I have known in my life, there is a kind of pressure, a fatherly pressure, over the shoulder to do well in the world" (*Tim O'Brien* 33).

The fatherly pressure that O'Brien discusses carried over to Vietnam: "This pressure sometimes pushes you to do well in bad kinds of ways, that is, to charge a bunker and get your head blown off so as to impress your father with a medal. You know that the pressure is there, a way of winning love" (*Tim O'Brien* 33). Wade and O'Brien are both desperate for their father's love. O'Brien uses some of the exact same wording in the novel when discussing John Wade.

> A guy might do something very brave—charge a bunker, maybe, or stand up tall under fire—and afterward everyone would look away and stay quiet for a while,

> then somebody would say, "How the fuck'd you do that?" and the brave guy would blink and shake his head, because he didn't know, because it was one of those incredible secrets inside him.
> (In the Lake 73)

Another example of O'Brien's real life struggle reflected through the novel is shown in John Wade's desperate need for love from Kathy: "More than anyone she'd ever known, John needed the conspicuous display of human love—absolute, unconditional love. Love without limit. Like a hunger… Sometimes he did bad things just to be loved, and sometimes he hated himself for needing love so badly" (*In the Lake* 55, 60). He repeats the idea and desperation a third time in his non-fiction piece "The Vietnam in Me" published in the *New York Times*: "Chubby and friendless and lonely. I had come to acknowledge, more or less, the dominant principle of love in my life, how far I would go to get it, how terrified I was of losing it. I have done bad things for love, bad things to stay loved" ("The Vietnam in Me"). O'Brien's desperation and need is obvious in the heartbreaking steps he takes in order to keep the love of Kate, his girlfriend in 1994, which results in the creation of love letters and mixed tapes. Some readers will wince in understanding and embarrassment for O'Brien's inability to move on in his life in the way that Kate has, and the reader develops immediate concern for the author when he admits "Last night suicide was on my mind. Not whether, but how" ("The Vietnam in Me" 2).

The timing and similarities of *In the Lake of the Woods* and the non-fiction piece "The Vietnam in Me" would imply that Kate was in the forefront of O'Brien's while writing *In the Lake*. He admits "in his 1994 article…that his personal life during the years since publication of *The Things They Carried* had been tumultuous…treatment for depression; the painful breakup of a lengthy relationship with a Harvard doctoral candidate [Kate]; and the emotional return to Quang Ngai Province and My Lai…" (*Tim O'Brien* 21). Although it may be going too far to speculate that Kathy Wade and O'Brien's Kate are similar, it is not going far enough to acknowledge that many events in the novel and in

his life are similar. O'Brien seeks affirmation in both, and he continues seeking affirmation.

Beyond the connections to his personal life as a child and as a man, the novel also makes connections to his life as a soldier. O'Brien isn't simply drawing on the historical documents available regarding My Lai. On the contrary, he was there. He discusses his time in Pinkville, the surrounding area of My Lai given this nickname to represent the area of dense population, in his memoir *If I Die in a Combat Zone*:

> Pinkville and the villages called My Lai were well known to alpha company. Even before the headlines and before the names Calley and Medina took their place in history, Pinkville was a feared and special place on the earth. In January, a month or so before I arrived in Vietnam, less than a year after the slaughter in My Lai 4, Alpha Company took part in massive Operation Russell Beach, joining forces with other army elements, boatloads of marines, the navy and air force. Subject of the intricately planned and much-touted campaign was Pinkville and the Batangan Peninsula…Despite publicity and War College strategy, the operation did not produce the anticipated results, and this unit learned some hard lessons about Pinkville. There was no reliable criterion by which to distinguish a pretty Vietnamese girl from a deadly enemy; often they were one and the same person. The unit triggered one mine after another during Operation Russell Beach. Frustration and anger built with each explosion and betrayal, one Oriental face began to look like any other, hostile and black, and Alpha Company was boiling with hate when it was pulled out of Pinkville. (*If I Die* 116)

O'Brien's firsthand experience at My Lai gives him special knowledge of the harshness of the area. He mentions several times in his memoir the anger of Alpha Company. Yet, even in his anger, he is able to maintain his humanity and feel sympathy for the Vietnamese people, a sympathy that has driven him to remind the American people of the tragedies that occurred in Vietnam.

His ability to create mystery about himself is present in the passage as well. He never writes *I was angry*; he always refers

to the anger as a presence within Alpha Company as if O'Brien was nothing but an observer at the time. He does this again in "The Vietnam in Me" when talking about love: "Vietnam was partly love. With each step, each light-year of a second, a foot soldier is always almost dead…you love your mom and dad, the Vikings, hamburgers on the grill, your pulse, your future—everything that might be lost or never come to be." Even in this passage, O'Brien slips quietly into second person voice, never taking full claim or responsibility for his feelings. Perhaps his use of second person is an effort to include an audience of readers who did not experience Vietnam. Perhaps the use of second person masks the desire to distance him from the hatred and love of Vietnam. Perhaps it is an effort to distance him from the guilt he was feeling about entering the war. Perhaps it is all three.

O'Brien was unsure of the necessity of the United States involvement in the Vietnam War from early on. He participated in war protests, took part in peace vigils and went door-to-door for Eugene McCarthy. As student-body president, O'Brien chose to back "McCarthy simply because at that time this senator was the only candidate who had taken a political stand against the war" (*Tim O'Brien* 12). When it came to receiving his draft notice, he did not show the same conviction: "I was a coward. I went to war" ("The Vietnam in Me").

The issue of politics creates an obvious bifurcation between the soldier Tim O'Brien and the soldier of John Wade. O'Brien went to war because he claims he was a coward; John Wade went to war to further his political career. Both men, however, are burdened with "all-consuming postwar guilt" (Herzog 901) and both men's guilt is reflected in the same fashion. In an interview with Tobey Herzog O'Brien admits, " 'I wake up the way John Wade wakes up, screaming ugly, desperate and obscene things.[…] That 'Kill Jesus' refrain that appears throughout the book—that sense of self-hatred[…] comes from my own soul; it isn't a made-up refrain. It is a real one out of my own life'" ("True Lies" 901).

O'Brien's physical return from Vietnam is similar to John

Wade's. O'Brien writes, "When the no-smoking lights come on, you go into the back of the plane. You take off your uniform. You roll it into a ball and stuff it into your suitcase and put on a sweater and blue jeans. You smile at yourself in the mirror" (*If I Die* 209). This story is repeated in the novel: "In the gray skies over North Dakota he [Wade] went back into the lavatory, where he took off his uniform and put on a sweater and slacks, then carefully appraised himself in the mirror…After a moment he winked at himself" (*In the Lake* 41).

It is difficult, if not impossible, to verify whether or not what O'Brien has said about himself and the past is true or to separate fact from fiction in his novel. His personal biography is often contradictory. There are certain aspects about his childhood that can be verified; we know his father suffered from alcoholism. There are certain aspects about his love life that can be verified; we know that he felt a profound loss when Kate and O'Brien separated. There are certain aspects of his life as a soldier that can be verified; we know he was in My Lai. We know he holds great contempt for the atrocities that occurred there. Each of these aspects is an important part of the novel. It is O'Brien's creation of the mystery that surrounds him that has become his emotional truth. In this way, he has (re)created a new biography through *In the Lake of the Woods*.

Section II: Discovering a Hero

When focusing on the second element of biomythography, specifically myth, O'Brien emphasizes the importance of myth, theme, and imagination as a way to change the world. *In the Lake of the Woods* becomes a myth within a myth, and O'Brien's thoughts on myth and imagination relate directly to the interpretation of Joseph Campbell, author and literary theorist, on myth. Campbell describes myth as "the living inspiration of whatever else may have appeared out of the activities of the human body and mind" (*Hero* 3). Campbell also believed the role of soldier was heroic and held a special place in mythology: "Joining the army, putting on a uniform, is another. You're giving up your personal life and accepting a socially determined

manner of life in the service of the society of which you are a member" (*Power of Myth* 12). As a side note, Campbell writes, "the very dreams that blister sleep, boil up from the basic, magic ring of myth" (*Hero* 3). The phrasing of this excerpt is startling. It is as if O'Brien were reading Campbell when he imagined the dreamlike moment of his character John Wade standing over Kathy with a boiling tea pot and blistering her sleeping face. O'Brien transformed Campbell's figurative language into a literal moment within the fiction text. There are more moments of similarities in Campbell's writing and O'Brien's which will be explored later in this section. For now, we must return to the definition of myth.

Campbell divided his exploration of myth or the basic monomyth, a paradigm meaning the journey a hero makes, into three great steps: separation, initiation, and return, "which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (*Hero* 30). Campbell also divided the three great steps into several sub-sections. Some of the steps that Campbell identifies are subverted, overlapping, and confused within O'Brien's text. The overlapping and confusion is partially because O'Brien does not choose to tell the story chronologically: "In commenting on his 'bouncing around in time' in his novels or his characters' propensity to engage in fantastic daydreams, O'Brien emphasized that he is merely exploring the realities of the human mind" (*Tim O'Brien* 22).

Throughout *In the Lake of the Woods*, O'Brien gives the reader information most authors would save for the end of a mystery. For example, O'Brien informs the reader on page three that Kathy is missing and on page nine that a missing person's report has been filed, a detail which he discloses in a footnote. The complex nature of the storytelling turns the contemporary notion of mystery on its head and makes the steps of the monomyth overlap. Not all of the sub-sections of the monomyth theory

exist within the novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, and the steps or layers that are presented will be explored, but not exhausted. The goal in this section is not to prove the theory of monomyth, but rather to establish that elements of myth exist within the novel as part of biomythography.

The first of Campbell's sub-sections within the great stage of departure is referred to as the "call to adventure" (*Hero* 51). He describes the call as "a rite , or moment, of spiritual passage, which when complete, amounts to a dying and a birth" (*Hero* 51). For the character John Wade, the call to adventure is the Vietnam War. Both O'Brien and Wade receive their "call" in the same fashion: a draft notice. Unlike many of the soldiers in Vietnam and unlike O'Brien himself, Wade does not fight the draft: "He graduated in June of 1967. There was a war in progress, which was beyond manipulation, and nine months later he found himself at the bottom of an irrigation ditch. The slime was waist-deep. He couldn't move. The trick was to stay sane" (*In the Lake* 36). The symbolism of Wade's spiritual rite of passage taking nine months—the same amount of time as a pregnancy—and finding himself covered in slime, as in the amniotic fluid of birth, is a direct connection to Campbell's definition of the call to adventure, death, and rebirth. John Wade is born a new character and a new man in Vietnam. He becomes the Sorcerer.

Although O'Brien does not mention reading Campbell, O'Brien is quoted by Bill Moyers, interviewer and friend of Joseph Campbell:

> Tim O'Brien once wrote: 'A thing may happen and be a total lie; another thing may not happen and be truer than the truth.' While most would not interpret myths as literal truth, those who study them tend to see in them a weighty metaphorical, archetypal truth, a truth about the unseen, ineffable dimensions of existence that lie outside the bounds of science and reason. ("On Faith & Reason")

Similarly, O'Brien comments directly on the myths he encountered as a child: "I also think that this detailed portrayal

of the horrors of violence is a reaction to the myths I grew up with as a kid: John Wayne movies and Audie Murphy movies and the little GI Joe comic books I used to read where death was inconsequential because it didn't seem very horrible at all" (*Artful Dodge*). O'Brien also comments on his respect for Toni Morrison's inclusion of myth in her text: "Mystery and myth are intermingled in a way that I very, very much admire…People are flying, but it happens mythically…That's a little thing I learned—relearned, I guess—from reading Toni Morrison's *Song of Solomon* and obviously applied it in my work" (*Artful Dodge*). The comments imply that although there is no direct link between Campbell and O'Brien, the two educated men were probably aware of one another's work, and O'Brien was aware of the idea of myth.

O'Brien's idea of myth is reflected in Campbell's "call to adventure." During the "call," Wade crosses what Campbell refers to as "the first threshold" (*Hero* 77). At the threshold, "the usual person is more than content…to remain within the indicated bounds…Thus the sailors of bold vessels of Columbus, breaking the horizon of the medieval mind—sailing, as they thought, into the boundless ocean of immortal being that surrounds the cosmos, like an endless mythological serpent biting its tail—had to be cozened and urged on like children" (*Hero* 78). Again, O'Brien connects to the hero's journey through imagery. He presents the very image of the snakes to guide the reader, but corrupts the image in an unlikely way:

> He compared their love to a pair of snakes he'd seen along a trail near Pinkville, each snake eating the other's tail, a bizarre circle of appetites that brought the heads closer and closer until one of the men in Charlie company used a machete to end it. 'That's how our love feels,' John wrote, 'like we're swallowing each other up, except in a good way, a perfect Number One Yum-Yum way, and I can't wait to get home and see what would've happened if those two dumbass snakes finally ate each other's heads. Think about it. The mathematics get weird.' (*In the Lake* 61)

The forceful separation of the serpent through use of the machete

symbolizes the forceful and violent separation of John and Kathy. It also represents John's fear of moving beyond the threshold and his desire to remain where he is powerful. He extends his stay in Vietnam: "Maybe someday I'll be able to explain it, but right now I can't leave this place. I have to take care of a few things, otherwise I won't ever get home. Not the right way" (*In the Lake* 147).

In mythology, the jungle is a place of darkness and evil, and O'Brien's setting strengthens the connection between John (or the Sorcerer) and the hero myth. Campbell writes, "The regions of the unknown (desert, jungle, deep sea, alien land, etc.) are free fields for the projection of the unconscious content. Incestuous *libido* and patricidal *destrudo* are thence reflected back against the individual and his society in forms suggesting threats of violence and fancied dangerous delight" (*Hero* 79). O'Brien supports this in the novel through the details of the Vietnam War. The soldiers in Vietnam and the jungle commit horrific deeds and acts of unspeakable violence and get away with it. The jungle or "free field" and the escalating violence of the troops is the new zone (My Lai) in which Sorcerer again loses himself. "For a few seconds," writes O'Brien, "Sorcerer shut his eyes and retreated behind the mirrors in his head, pretending to be elsewhere, but even then the landscapes kept coming at him fast and lurid" (*In the Lake* 105). Wade finds himself face down in a paddy, and "The others had vanished…the wind seemed to pick him up and blow him from place to place" (*In the Lake* 105). The wind blows him from man to man in his unit, each killing and performing horrific deeds: "T'Souvas was shooting children. Doherty and Terry were finishing off the wounded. This was not madness, Sorcerer understood. This was sin…And then for a while Sorcerer let himself glide away" (*In the Lake* 108).

Another great stage of Campbell's monomyth is referred to as the initiation. During the initiation stage the hero must face a "road of trials." It is in this stage that "…having traversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials"

(*Hero* 97). For John Wade this landscape is again the jungles of Vietnam. Campbell writes, "it may be that he here discovers for the first time that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage" (*Hero* 97). Wade's power is magic.

John Wade uses his magic as power over the enemy, over his fellow soldiers, and over his own mind. O'Brien writes, "Sorcerer, they called him: 'Sorcerer's our man.' And for John Wade…the nickname was like a special badge, an emblem of belonging and brotherhood…A nifty sound, too—Sorcerer—it had magic, it suggested certain powers, certain rare skills and aptitudes" (*In the Lake* 37). He delights and entertains the men with his powers, winning them over and using the benign power to his advantage: "Amazing, they'd say. Man's plugged into the spirit world. John Wade encouraged the mystique" (*In the Lake* 38). For Wade these powers are connected to evil. O'Brien writes, "He couldn't go wrong. Wickedness was everywhere. 'I'm the company witch doctor,' he wrote Kathy. 'These guys listen to me. They actually believe in this shit'" (*In the Lake* 38). He is attempting to control those around him with his magic. He will continue to try to use this power to control the polls and to control Kathy when he returns to the United States

In Vietnam, Wade's power leads to murder when he reflexively kills a farmer and a fellow soldier. Wade is offered many moments in the story when he could explain or confess his wrongdoings to the world, showing the world the horrible nature of what has happened. Instead he chooses to forget. The magic of forgetting for Wade is not transformative; it is merely a way of coping. Wade is a selfish man attempting to forget what he is destined to remember, what is his "boon" or knowledge, what he must pass on to the rest of the world: the atrocities that human beings are capable of. Otherwise the people of the world are destined again and again to repeat these same mistakes. "John Wade did his best to apply the trick of forgetfulness…he went out of his way to confront hazard, walking point or leading night patrols, which were acts of erasure, a means of burying one great horror," but the trick does not help. Nonetheless, "sometimes the

trick almost worked. Sometimes he almost forgot" (*In the Lake* 148).

During the morning of the massacre, Wade has a sense that "something was wrong. He felt dazed and half asleep, still dreaming wild dawn dreams…All he could do was close his eyes and kneel there and wait for whatever was wrong with the world to right itself," writes O'Brien (*In the Lake* 104,108). His powers as Sorcerer are useless here:

> Sorcerer thought he could get away with murder. He believed it. After he'd shot PFC Weatherby—which was an accident, the purest reflex—he tricked himself into believing it hadn't happened the way it happened. He pretended he wasn't responsible; he pretended he couldn't have done it and therefore hadn't; he pretended it didn't matter much; he pretended that if the secret stayed inside him, with all the other secrets, he could fool the world and himself too. (*In the Lake* 68)

O'Brien details Wade's state of mind: "At times he wondered about his mental health. The internal terrain had gone blurry; he couldn't get his bearings. 'Something's wrong,' he wrote Kathy. 'Don't do this to me. I'm not blind—Sorcerer can *see*'" (*In the Lake* 39). He is unable to differentiate between John Wade and the Sorcerer, and the Sorcerer's magic is winning. Later, this magic takes a more concrete form when he changes his military record in order to erase the past. He was reassigned to duty in a battalion office. It was here that Wade attempts to erase the evils he has committed.

> Over the next two hours he made the necessary changes, mostly retyping, some scissors work, removing his name from each document and carefully tidying up the numbers… Among the men in Charlie Company he was known only as Sorcerer. Very few had ever heard his real name; fewer still would recall it. And over time, he trusted, memory itself would be erased. (*In the Lake* 269)

He does not use his powers over magic for good purposes. He uses them for self-gain, which further subverts his role as hero.

Therefore, when John returns to the States, he is unable to make it a better place; he, instead, becomes an anti-hero. He hasn't learned what he needs to about humanity and can never truly become a fully realized hero as defined by Campbell.

One adventure cycle ends for Sorcerer and another begins when he is sent back to the States to pursue a political career. It could be argued that this return to the United States is equal to Campbell's return of the hero from his hero-quest; however, John Wade does not come back to the United States as himself. He returns as the Sorcerer. "He was still gliding," writes O'Brien (*In the Lake* 42). He is still inward, attempting to overcome his internal trials. His continued dreaming validates the nature of where he is in the mythological process. The passage continues with a list of dreams that Wade is unable to stop:

> Exotic fevers swept through his blood. He couldn't get traction on his own dreams…the dream-reels kept unwinding. Crazy stuff. Kathy shoveling rain off a sidewalk. Kathy waving at him from the wing of an airplane. At one point, near dawn, he found himself curled up on the floor, wide awake, conversing with the dark. He was asking his father to please stop dying. Over and over he kept saying please, but his father wouldn't. (*In the Lake* 42)

He is unable to use his powers to stop the dreams, and the hallucinations become real life for Wade. Campbell writes, "All these different mythologies give us the same essential quest. You leave the world that you're in and go into a depth or into a distance…There you come to what was missing in your consciousness in the world you formerly inhabited. Then comes the problem with staying with that…or returning with the boon" (*Power of Myth* 129).

It is in this return that the hero can either succeed or fail by returning with what he has learned. John Wade fails, but O'Brien's anonymous narrator takes over for Wade. Campbell writes, "When the hero-quest has been accomplished, through penetration to the source…the adventurer still must return with his life-transmuting trophy…But the responsibility has been

frequently refused. Even the Buddha, after his triumph, doubted whether the message of realization could be communicated, and saints are reported to have passed away while in the supernal ecstasy" (*Hero* 193). John has physically returned from Vietnam, but he is unable to pass on what he has learned.

O'Brien uses his narrator to enter the next stage of the quest, "applying the boon." It is up to the narrator, who has been privy to Wade's journey, to use what he has learned to make the world a better place, and it is here where the novel becomes a myth within a myth. O'Brien allows John Wade to drift, literally and figuratively, away from the story, forever on his own quest to find Kathy:

> "Seriously, I'd be fine," he said. "A compass and maps, no problem. Maybe a radio."
> "So?" Claude said. "And then what?"
> "Just look."
> "Right. End up same place as your wife."
> "It's something I have to try."
> Pat lifted her gaze. "God, such chivalry. I love it. I bet Kathy would too."
> "I don't mean—"
> "The Lone Ranger."
> Claude glared across the table… "Whatever your personal problems, let's be real extra-clear. There's this word no, it means not a chance. It means forget it."
> "He's good at that," Pat said. "A good chivalrous forgetter." (*In the Lake* 240)

In the above passage the image of hero is again multi-layered. It's no accident that O'Brien's main character's name, John Wade, closely resembles America's popular movie soldier and hero, John Wayne. O'Brien often refers to the mentality of the United States entering into wars as that of (like John Wayne) the Lone Ranger: "We salute ourselves and take pride in America the White Knight, America the Lone Ranger…" ("The

Vietnam in Me"). O'Brien is also referring to America when he mentions the "good chivalrous forgetter" (*In the Lake* 240). O'Brien and his narrator use what they have learned to create a novel that will help the people of the world learn from the history of Vietnam. America likes to forget the evils it has done. The Native Americans, slavery, the massacre at My Lai, all footnotes in our country's emotional history. O'Brien writes, "Evil has no place, it seems, in our national mythology" ("The Vietnam in Me"). We are a country with the inability to think beyond ourselves in terms of the world.

The final layer of the previous passage is John's intent on sacrificing himself for love. It is at this point we realize John (like the country) has not learned, and he cannot continue in the real world. Again the passage is multi-layered. Wade is using his magic one last time to disappear with Kathy.

Wade's disappearance opens the door for O'Brien's narrator to offer history. Even when the massacre was front page news, the nation did not seem to care. The issue wasn't *what* happened; the issue was what happened *now that we had been caught*. Everyone wanted to forget, just as John Wade did and just as the nation did. Even the historical accounts of My Lai comment on our ability to forget:

> My Lai is now almost completely forgotten, erased almost entirely from the national consciousness. What was once an image of incandescent horror has become at most a vague recollection of something unpleasant that happened during the Vietnam War. Even the newspapers of the time, a process of eclipse can be traced clearly. What was first a "massacre" quickly became a "tragedy" and was then referred to as an "incident." (Bilton and Sim 4).

O'Brien's myth within a myth is attempting to force the nation to remember. The forgetting hasn't made the nation better. O'Brien is trying to "apply the boon" and to show us how a situation like My Lai can happen again. He is trying to prevent future tragedies. O'Brien's anonymous narrator confers the boon or applies what humanity must learn:

> I arrived in-country a year after John Wade, in 1969, and walked exactly the ground he walked…I know what happened that day. I know how it happened… It was the wickedness that soaks into your blood and slowly heats up and begins to boil. Frustration, partly. Rage, partly. The enemy was invisible. They were ghosts. They killed us with land mines and booby traps; …This is not to justify what occurred on March 16, 1968, for in my view such justifications are both futile and outrageous. Rather, it's to bear witness to the mystery of evil. (*In the Lake* 199)

Sadly, we have not learned. Receiving the boon requires the nation to remember and take custody of our knowledge. It requires leaders to take responsibility for mistakes and make changes for the better. We have forgotten Vietnam. In many ways, John's hero-journey or quest is the same quest of the nation. As a nation we hear the "call to adventure"; we often experience "rebirth"; we meet "supernatural aids"; we receive knowledge or a "boon." It is when we attempt to apply the knowledge regarding war that we stumble in the same way that Wade stumbled.

By forgetting our past, our mythology, we are removing the part of ourselves that is required for us to grow. Each lesson is a clue to create a better world. Without these memories we are lost and will be destined to commit the same crimes again, until we learn. Those in society who remember the past have not forced the issue. Campbell says it best: "Myths are clues to the spiritual potentialities of the human life…We're so engaged in doing things to achieve purposes of outer value that we forget that the inner value, the rapture that is associated with being alive, is what it's all about" (*Power of Myth* 5-6). We have forgotten the inner value of human nature. We have forgotten our history.

Section III: The Fiction of History

To fully understand the nature of the country and to get an idea of Tim O'Brien's state of mind during the Vietnam War, we must first revisit what historians have written during this time and examine the third element of biomythography: history.

Incidents that go back as far as the cold war, McCarthyism, Vietnam, and occurrences like Watergate helped to nurture the cancer of mistrust toward the government that now exists in the minds of the American people, but nothing fertilized this mistrust or pierced the hearts of the citizens like the graphic stories and pictures of the life of soldiers in Vietnam, specifically the My Lai Massacre.

America officially entered the Vietnam War in 1965 (although many historians agree that American was involved in the war much earlier than this year). President Lyndon Johnson decided to enter the war through a resolution of Congress known as the "Gulf of Tonkin Resolution" (Caputo 28). The resolution was named after two American destroyer boats that reported "they were under attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats" (Caputo 28). Questions now remain as to whether or not either of the attacks actually occurred. The gulf incident combined with the fear of the "domino theory: If we leave Vietnam with our tail between our legs, the consequences of this defeat in the rest of Asia, Africa, and Latin America would be disastrous" (Karnow 399). Even though it never happened, the "domino theory," or belief that other countries near Vietnam would fall to communism, was the push the government needed to become an active particpant in the war in Vietnam.

Initially, the American population supported Johnson's decision to participate in the Vietnam War in an effort to stop the spread of Communism, but this soon changed. Television news crews brought the American people face-to-face with what was happening. Philip Caputo, a lieutenant in Vietnam and a Pulitzer Prize-Winning Journalist, writes, "ultimately, television's graphic, moving pictures of burning villages, dead bodies, blood-covered soldiers and civilians, and panic-stricken children would bring the war into Americans' living rooms. In the United States, the immediacy and the vividness of television reports would profoundly affect opinions about the war" (Caputo 68). Previously, the North Vietnamese had been reported as a weak and easily defeated enemy, but the impression of the strength of the North was "reinforced by the oftentimes biased news reports"

(Caputo 76). President Johnson "never went on campaign to fully explain to the American people why he was sending troops to Vietnam" (Caputo 78). Johnson's unwillingness to share the reasons for involvement behind the war encouraged America's distrust and spoke to the nature of Johnson's character, which O'Brien explores in the novel. Aides and those close to Johnson claimed, "too bold an approach would be difficult to justify to the American public" (Karnow 397) and urged Johnson to remain quiet.

The public's support of the war quickly started to dissipate. News reports, a tight-lipped president, combined with reports of atrocities such as the My Lai massacre turned the public completely against the war. Several of the antiwar supporters included men involved in the draft. In his book, *10,000 Days of Thunder*, Caputo quotes Tim O'Brien's sentiments about the draft:

> 'There were a lot of us in Vietnam who didn't want to be there, and many of us didn't have the courage to do what the resisters did. It took a lot of courage to cross the border and leave behind your family and your hometown and your girlfriend…I ended up going to Vietnam just to protect my reputation and sense of self-esteem, but the guys who went to Canada somehow were able of find the moral courage to make a choice they knew was gonna dog them the rest of their lives.' (Caputo 88)

With American support shifting, protesters used the momentum to push the antiwar movement into full swing. Johnson did not run for a second term, and President Nixon was voted into office. The push to remove troops from Vietnam began. The publishing of classified US documents, called the "Pentagon Papers," stating that "the government had misled its citizens about a war many of its own experts felt could not be won" (Caputo 110) and abuse of power by President Nixon cemented the complete mistrust of the American people toward government, politicians, and leaders in the American military. The lack of trust continues today, especially with current incidents from the Iraq War like that of the mistreatment of

prisoners at Abu Ghraib. There were many, many more historical incidents that could be expanded upon to understand the nature of America's mistrust of government, but for the purpose of this essay, a general mindset of the public is all that is needed, and the mindset during the late 1960s and early 1970s was to get out of Vietnam.

Even though soldiers like O'Brien wanted out of the war, the fear of losing respect and love was an enormous issue, so much so that it became a theme in much of his work. This love of country theme, or the desire to do what is patriotic so as not to lose the love of country, family, and friends, is particularly applicable in the novel *In the Lake of the Woods*, because of the in-depth history that O'Brien gives of the event. Wars and/or the conclusion of war seem to be decided based on the mood of the nation. Polls are used as a measurement of love; and decisions are made out of fear of losing the love of the country. Political beliefs become influenced by loyalty, rumor, and artificial guidelines.

Many times politicians make decisions based on myth and what they believe to be true or through purposeful misinformation by altering historical facts in order to create a universal perception and more socially acceptable version of history. This is where biomythography and Tim O'Brien fit in. Thematically, O'Brien's novel connects to biomythography "as a way to view myth as much a part of history as historical fact" (Warburton). In the novel, O'Brien attempts to create a new understanding of politics, to create an insight into the minds of politicians, to give a glimpse into America's dark interest in politics and violence, and to remind readers of the atrocities in My Lai; he does this, again, through the character of John Wade.

The desire and need for politicians to maintain the love of the country parallel John Wade's reasons for entering politics. O'Brien states, "That's why I made him a politician. Part of what drives politicians is to be loved. Politicians are looking for love and approval and affection. That drives them at least as much as anything else" (Edelman). In this part of the novel, historical

and fictional characters overlap. These desperate sentiments are also reflected in the three presidents that are mentioned in the novel: Wilson, Nixon, and Johnson.

Woodrow Wilson is mentioned in less depth in the novel than Nixon and Johnson; however, that does not diminish the importance of his presence. Wilson is the only other president (prior to the publication of the book) that drew America into a war for less than noble reasons. Wilson began conflict with Mexico during the Mexican Revolution with little or no provocation:

> The American capitalists supported Huerta, but President Woodrow Wilson did not. In April 1914, nine American soldiers were arrested for allegedly entering a prohibited zone in Tampico. With this action, Wilson had an excuse to invade Mexico. Wilson sent marines to Veracruz, a Mexican port, and the force overthrew Huerta. Mexicans responded with anti-American riots, and the European press denounced the American intervention. ("The Tampico Affair")

Wilson's character also parallels John Wade in his desire to be loved:

> Wilson's own recollections of his youth furnish ample indication of his early fears that he was stupid, ugly, worthless, and unlovable…It is perhaps to this core feeling of inadequacy, of a fundamental worthlessness which must ever be disproved, that the unappeasable quality of his need for affection, power, and achievement, and the compulsive quality of his striving for perfection, may be traced. (*In the Lake* 194)

Wilson's desperate need for approval is also similar to that of John Wade. This is evident again in the text through Wilson's own words: "There surely never lived a man with whom love was a more critical matter than it is with me" (*In the Lake* 28). The need is also evident through Wade: "He had wanted to be loved. And to be loved he had practiced deception. He had hidden the bad things. He had tricked up his own life only for love. Only to be loved" (*In the Lake* 243). Both men were willing to go to extreme measures for acceptance.

Lyndon Johnson was willing to go to extremes as well. Johnson's historical role in O'Brien's novel is more important and more predominant than Wilson's. O'Brien writes, "Pouring out affection, [Lyndon Johnson] asked—over and over, in every letter, in fact, that survives—that the affection be reciprocated" (*In the Lake* 28). The desperate request for love and affection feels completely contradictory to Johnson's behavior. Historically, Lyndon Johnson is portrayed as a liar and a bully in O'Brien's novel: "[After his 1941 defeat] Johnson's frustration and rage erupted over hapless aides…[He was] screaming and hollering, and throwing his arms…" (*In the Lake* 100).

These same characteristics seem present in the historical information available regarding Johnson. O'Brien quotes Robert A. Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson several times throughout *In the Lake of the Woods*: "When he was a college student, [Lyndon Johnson's] fellow students…believed not only that he lied to them constantly, lied about big matters and small, lied so incessantly that he was, in a widely used phrase, 'the biggest liar on campus'—but also that some psychological element impelled him to lie" (*In the Lake* 195). Here is the same damaging and truthful quote as it appears in the introduction of Caro's book:

> He was, in fact, so deeply and widely mistrusted at college that the nickname he bore during all his years there was "Bull" (for "Bullshit") Johnson. Most significant, perhaps, the dislike and distrust of him extended beyond politics. As President, Lyndon Johnson would be accused of lying to the American people. When he was a college student, his fellow students…. believed not only that he lied to them—lied to them constantly…lied so incessantly that he was, in widely used phrase, "the biggest liar on campus…" (Caro xx)

O'Brien is displaying a common thread of deceit among politicians, particularly the politicians involved in the Vietnam War.

Surprisingly, of the three presidents mentioned in the text, Nixon seems to escape the most scrutiny. Richard Nixon's

name is synonymous in history with the term Watergate, a major incident in U.S. history that set the standard for deceit within politics. He is also the president in office when journalist Seymour Hersh broke the news of My Lai. Initially, Nixon "made a pledge that those responsible would be brought to justice" (Briton and Sim 12). Most politicians were surprised by the public's response to the massacre. The outrage quickly dissipated and "only weeks later, a *Time* magazine poll showed that 65 percent of Americans thought that incidents like My Lai were 'bound to happen in war.' By the time of Lt. Calley's trial, in 1970, the balsamic attraction of the argument had done much to persuade most Americans that it was wrong to prosecute American soldiers for 'doing their duty'" (Briton and Sim 12). Later, Nixon was the president that granted the pardon to Lt. William Calley, the only soldier convicted of a crime for the My Lai massacre, after Calley had served only four months in prison. Nixon seemed to make excuses for Calley, and O'Brien again incorporates history into the text:

> The point of greatest danger for an individual confronted with a crisis is not during the period of preparation for the battle, not fighting the battle itself, but in the period immediately after the battle is over. Then, completely exhausted and drained emotionally, he must watch his decision most carefully. There is an increased possibility of error because he may lack the necessary cushion of emotional and mental reserve which is essential for good judgment. (*In the Lake* 99-100)

When Calley was released "Judge Robert Elliott…observed: 'War is war and it's not unusual for innocent civilians such as the My Lai victims to be killed'" (Briton and Sim 2). After Calley's release, he gave lectures at universities, married, and took over as manager in a jewelry store in Georgia. O'Brien includes a passing mention of this jewelry store as noted earlier.

If the country is so willing to forget, the next logical question would be, why does O'Brien bother? O'Brien troubles himself with the recreation of history because it is important for the security of humankind's emotional psyche. This basic

mistrust and obsession with politicians and politics in general affect the nation's emotional well-being and will continue to eat away at humanity. O'Brien writes the entire nation into his text through John Wade:

> We moved like sleepwalkers through the empty villages, shadowed by an enemy we could never find… We brutalized. We wasted. We pistol-whipped…In a peculiar way, even at this very instant, the ordeal of John Wade—the long decades of silence and lies and secrecy—all this has a vivid, living clarity that seems far more authentic than my own faraway experience. Maybe that's what this book is for. To remind me. To give me back my vanished life. (*In the Lake* 298)

O'Brien makes the war vivid for us again through the novel.

The effects of Vietnam were felt in the 1990s and are still being felt today. Author Bruce Franklin echoes this belief:

> *In the Lake of the Woods* does connect to the most essential truths about Vietnam's role in the politics and culture of the nation in the 1980s and 1990s. Just over two years after Kathy and John Wade vanish in fiction, the denial that O'Brien is dramatizing was given its most succinct statement by President George Bush in his inaugural address: "The final lesson of Vietnam is that no great nation can long afford to be sundered by a memory." (Franklin)

As Franklin says, if all that the American people learned from Vietnam is that we cannot afford to be separated by a memory, then authors like O'Brien have an enormous, if not insurmountable, task in front of them. Deeds like My Lai must be remembered in order for politicians and the U.S. Military to maintain their humanity. O'Brien reiterated this point in an interview:

> America is not the policeman of the universe, we can't just appoint ourselves as cops… After Vietnam, there was a sense of impotence that swept across the nation and entered into our psyches. We had been the Lone Ranger for so many years, and now we were unmasked. We've wanted to pump iron for so many years, show that we're tough guys, you know,… go into Iraq and kick ass. The Vietnam syndrome. (Edel-

man).

The role of the Vietnam War in O'Brien's novel explores his love of his home country, his guilt for entering the military, and his effort to expose the nation for banishing the evils of war. O'Brien argues that his sins in war are greater than the average soldier because he "entered the military as a 'guilt' (his word), knowing that the war in Viet Nam was 'ill-conceived and morally wrong'" (*Tim O'Brien* 14). The guilt he feels in the novel is reflected through the involvement of his main character, John Wade, in the My Lai Massacre: "'Please,' Sorcerer [Wade] said again. He felt very stupid. Thirty meters up the trail he came across Conti and Meadlo and Rusty Calley. Meadlo and the lieutenant were spraying gunfire into a crowd of villagers. They stood side by side, taking turns. Meadlo was crying. Conti was watching" (*In the Lake* 107). O'Brien includes his main fictional character in a reenactment of an actual war crime committed during the Vietnam War. The only fictional part of the story is the presence of John Wade and the character Richard Thinbill. O'Brien uses the backdrop of the massacre to convey his guilt over the war and to bring attention to atrocities forgotten by the American people. He heightens the fictional/historical moment by including genuine quotes from the trials of William Calley, a soldier convicted of war crimes against the Vietnamese.

O'Brien rewrites history by including the transcripts of another soldier responsible for many deaths in My Lai, Paul Meadlo:

> Q: What did you do?
> A: I held my M-16 on them.
> Q: Why?
> A: Because they might attack.
> Q: They were children and babies?
> A: Yes.
> Q: And they might attack? Children and babies?
> A: They might've had a fully loaded grenade on them. The mothers might have throwed them at us.

Q: Babies?
A: Yes.
Q: Were the babies in their mothers' arms?
A: I guess so.
Q: And the babies moved to attack?
A: I expected at any moment they were about to make a counterbalance.
(In the Lake 136)

To demonstrate O'Brien's goal to be historically accurate, below is the same excerpt from a "historical" source:

Q: What did you do?
A: I held my M-16 on them.
Q: Why?
A: Because they might attack.
Q: They were children and babies?
A: Yes.
Q: And they might attack
A: They might have had a fully loaded grenade on them. The mothers might have throwed them at us.
Q: Babies?
A: Yes.
Q: Then why didn't you shoot them?
A: I didn't have no orders to kill them right then.
Q: Why didn't you fire first when Lieutenant Calley said, "I want them dead"?
A: Because Lieutenant Calley started firing first. I don't know why I didn't fire first.
Q: What were the people doing when Lieutenant Calley arrived?
A: They were sitting down.
Q: The women, the children and babies were sitting down?
A: Yes.
Q: Did they attack you?

A: I assumed at every minute that they would counterbalance. I thought they had some sort of chain or a little string they had to give a little pull and they blow us up, things like that.
Q: What did you do?
A: I just watched them. I was scared all the ime.
Q: How many people did you take to the ditch?
A: Seven or eight people...
Q: And it was your job?
A: It was my job, yes.
Q: What were the children in the ditch doing?
A: I don't know.
Q: Were the babies in their mother's arms?
A: I guess so.
Q: And the babies moved to attack?
A: I expected at any moment they were about to make a counterbalance
Q: Had they made any move to attack?
A: No…
("The My Lai Court-Martial")

The horror of the testimony is an effective reminder of the atrocities that took place. O'Brien intermingles the testimony with quotes from other survivors, public officials, and prominent authors. O'Brien's opinion of these events is reflected again through the voice of his fictional character and the narrator-biographer. He writes, "At the Son My Memorial, which I visited in the course of research for this book, the number is fixed at 504 (Vietnamese killed during My Lai). An amazing experience, by the way. Thuan Yen is still a quiet little farming village, very poor, very remote…The ditch is still there. I found it easily. Just five or six feet deep, shallow and unimposing, yet it was as if I had been there before, in my dreams, or in some other life" (*In the Lake* 146). His anonymous narrator is able to tell the world about the war and expose lies of Wade and politicians without losing track of the historical evidence. O'Brien reiterated the story in his autobiographical piece: "The Army's Criminal

Investigation Division produced sufficient evidence to charge 30 men with war crimes. Of these, only a single soldier, First Lieut. William Laws Calley Jr., was ever convicted or spent time in prison…his ultimate jail time amounted to three days in a stockade and four and a half months in prison" ("The Vietnam in Me").

O'Brien admits that personal and historical incidents in his writing "are not only numerous, but they're also incredibly important in my work: the father theme, the theme of heroism, the theme of history and war, the theme of loneliness and alienation, the theme of the importance of imagination in our lives as a way to escape and to change the world" (*Tim O'Brien* 4). In many ways, the reader is unable to escape the world that O'Brien has created. He does not allow us to dismiss the horror. O'Brien writes, "The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness" (*In the Lake* 138). By incorporating history in his fiction he has recreated events for the same purposes as those in the genre of biomythography. He is documenting historical moments to (re)create not so much a chronological reading of historical events, but to establish a cultural history through theme and image. His work "has become the Vietnam literature of record for many students introduced to contemporary war fiction" (Smith 12). O'Brien adds, "In the colleges and high schools I sometimes visit, the mention of My Lai brings on null stares, a sort of puzzlement, disbelief mixed with utter ignorance" (Smith 15). His objective is to stop the ignorance, and he is doing it through a recreation of history, myth, and biography in fiction.

Section IV: Bringing Biomythography into the Classroom

In the introduction of this essay, I mentioned my experience in an English class in high school. Like O'Brien, I focused on the emotional truth connected to the moment. Darren was in my class and he was quite adorable, but I did not have a crush on him. Mrs. Copperud was my teacher, but I'm not sure if she read O'Brien aloud or not. What is true in the situation is

that Mrs. Copperud introduced me to the author Tim O'Brien, and that moment was a major turning point in my exploration of literature. I read O'Brien's work because he was from my hometown, and I could connect to him in a way that I could not with other authors. I suddenly felt like the world became a place where even small-town kids could succeed, which is an amazing gift to a young adult. For this gift, I am forever grateful to Mrs. Copperud and Tim O'Brien, and I hope this essay will provide a way for other educators to bring him into the classroom.

There are many ways to bring together war literature, Tim O'Brien's work, and an exploration of biography, myth, and history in a pedagogical setting. Tim O'Brien explores the horrible nature of the Vietnam War for a generation of readers who do not know or may not understand that period in America's history. To assist students in comprehending the objective of the author and the full nature of the novel, instructors must address each of the areas of biomythography separately, and this is perhaps best done with the pairing of secondary texts.

The utilization of secondary work in the classroom will be vital for many students' appreciation of the text. When exploring the biographical aspects of O'Brien's work, the first text I suggest reading is his memoir, *If I Die in a Combat Zone, Box Me Up And Ship Me Home* and his article, "The Vietnam in Me." These texts will lay the foundation of Tim O'Brien's experience in Vietnam and help students relate to how O'Brien's time in Vietnam coincides with the characters in his novel. I would also recommend reading on-line interviews as well as the biographical information written by Tobey Herzog. Herzog was allowed access to O'Brien that few interviewers have had. His work seems insightful and thorough and explores the nature of O'Brien's childhood. These secondary works help understand not only who O'Brien is, but who John Wade, the main character, is and what role he represents in the novel.

When exploring the mythology of the novel, a discussion of Joseph Campbell's work is a must. A review and definition of the steps (i.e. separation, initiation, and return) will help students understand the concepts of hero and anti-hero in myth. An

instructor may want to explore a piece in which the elements of the hero's journey are more evident, such as *The Odyssey*, and then discuss where those steps are present or subverted in the novel, *In the Lake of the Woods*. Homer's myth could be particularly useful in the exploration of the long war; the estrangement of Odysseus from home involving a ten-year absence, during which his family alternately loses hope in his return or continues to search for clues about him; the home-coming and the purposeful disguise he wears to conceal his identity from those he loves and those who seek to erase him; his sudden exposure of himself to the 108 suitors whom he colludes with the goddess of war and the creative arts to kill; his repatriation with his wife Penelope; and his assumption of his political role as head of the city-state of Ithaca. Each of these elements could be paired with John Wade's journey in O'Brien's novel.

If an instructor chooses to examine the history of the time, the resources are limitless. The "Peers Report" is available on-line, along with transcripts from the My Lai trials. A contemporary documentary called "The Fog of War" focuses on Robert McNamara's role in Vietnam and would be a great book-end to students' research. The "Fog of War" website also includes some truly amazing lesson plans for teachers exploring the history of war. Other fictional stories that examine the emotion of the period are Aimee Phan's *We Should Never Meet*. Phan's stories examine the Vietnam War from the unique perspective of the Vietnamese woman. Robert Bly, Allen Ginsberg, and Adrienne Rich all explored the Vietnam War through their amazing poetry. The opportunities in poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and film to explore the Vietnam War and Tim O'Brien's connection to the history could go on and on.

If I were teaching this text in a classroom, the writing and discussion of history in the United States would be the biggest link to the text. I would begin with students' journaling what they know and understand to be true about the Vietnam War in American History. The journal could take the form of an ongoing reaction to each text that they are exposed to during the course and could be completed in the form of a written diary or

electronic blog. O'Brien's text is very readable and accessible to students. What they learn from each text and what they will find is historically accurate in a work of fiction may come as a surprise to some. The goal would be for them to understand the value of art in a text like O'Brien's as well as greater understanding of America's role in the Vietnam War.

I would conclude the course or section with an assignment for the student to write an argument synthesis, defending or opposing America's role in the Vietnam War, World War II, or the War in Iraq. The paper would bring together what they have learned, how their views have changed, and what they want as Americans for the future of the United States. There is also an opportunity for a creative paper in this unit. The students could each write their own fictional biomythography, and examine a moment in history that changed the trajectory of their lives. They could incorporate elements of their personal biography, elements of the hero myth, and real quotes or statistics from texts. Each of these ideas is merely a suggestion for a pedagogical approach. Like the available research on Vietnam, the list could go on and on.

In the Lake of the Woods is an opportunity for educators to excite students about art and history. O'Brien offers students a glimpse of how history, biography, myth, and fiction sometimes blur together, how humanity does not always listen to the lessons that history is teaching, and how art offers more than just a way to pass the time. The novel is an excellent way for students to (re) learn history and (re)examine their own concept of fiction and an excellent way for instructors to help students see themselves through biomythography.

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"My Wife…Gets Bad Guys": How One Instructor's Vicarious Experience Influences His Classroom Identity and Practice

Elizabeth Kirchoff

In *MEJ*'s most recent call for papers, readers were provided a list of possible topics to assist in "expressing and shaping *your* interests in and concerns about the materials you bring to the classroom, the students you bring them to, and your invention of strategies for engaging those students in those materials" (original emphasis, "Call for Papers" 215). The list was thought provoking, but it was this particular passage that intrigued me the most. What, I wondered, shapes our interests in the materials we bring to the classroom and our strategies for engaging students in those materials? While I do not purport to have a definitive answer, I would like to share a recent, unexpected discovery that addresses this very question.

> For the past several years, I have been studying identity and its influence on pedagogical and curricular topics. My most recent research in this area is a qualitative study of one instructor, four students, their perceptions of each other's identity, and the way these perceptions influence understandings of teacher feedback to student writing. However, as I sifted through thousands of pages of data (the hallmark of qualitative research) and drew conclusions related to my original research question, I also inadvertently uncovered an interesting link between the participating instructor's identity and his interpretation of literary works, his creation of writing assignments, and

his techniques for facilitating class discussion. What is most intriguing about this link is that it stems not from the instructor's first-hand experience (which many consider the crux of identity construction), but through his vicarious experience as the spouse of a prosecuting attorney. As this particular case demonstrates, the identity of people close to us influences our classroom decisions—perhaps to an extent that we do not realize.

Constructing Identity

Identity is constructed in numerous ways. For instance, identity may be constructed through cultural experience, through items we purchase, consume, utilize, and display, and through spoken and unspoken language. Chappell, Rhodes, Solomon, Tennant, and Yates note that "identities are never unified but consist of multiple processes of identification that are constructed by different, often intersecting and sometimes antagonistic … practices that make particular identifications possible" (28). Through this lens, identity is viewed as fluid—constantly constructed and reconstructed according to various encounters, situations, and sets of expectations. We become adaptable "performers" in various real-life endeavors. As Beach, Thein, and Parks explain, "Identity construction is primarily a matter of performing different identities relative to specific activities and contexts" (17). On a daily basis, people engage in numerous activities and social contexts that direct their performances and shape their identities.

One source refers to the social contexts that influence performance as "figured worlds" (Holland, Skinner, Lachicotte, and Cain 49). Holland et al. explain that within figured worlds, "particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others" (52). In other words, people project and interpret distinguishable communicative traits depending upon the situations they face. For example, a student's behavior or comments may be perceived as disruptive or annoying in the classroom when these same behaviors or comments could very well be deemed appropriate and acceptable in a different setting. Likewise, an instruc-

tor may adopt specific language, manner, attire, and mood in the classroom which is probably quite different from the language, manner, attire, and mood this same instructor adopts at a festive family gathering, a community activity, or an academic committee meeting. Our figured worlds—the places in which we act and interact—shape our activities, language, mannerisms, and perceptions of ourselves as well as others in those worlds. We behave differently dependent upon where we are and what is expected of us, and we perceive others' performances positively or negatively (and everything in between) based on a similar set of standards. As identity theorist Julie Bettie says, "We are always performing our cultural identities—the performance *is* the self" (52).

Social markers, such as class, gender, race, and culture, also influence identity. However, Bettie contends that social markers may be exemplified by factors beyond the obvious. For example, while "class" is often marked by one's economic income, it might also be marked by an individual's occupation, family relations, social relations, leisure activities, and consumption practices (200-201). In the case of socio-economic status, then, rituals common in upper class circles may be perceived as phony or pretentious to members outside of this group.

In her study of teenage girls in the figured world of one particular high school in Los Angeles, California, Bettie uncovers evidence of the ways in which consumption practices reflect one's identity. In particular, her analysis of material markers such as clothing, makeup, and shoes reveals that members within specific social groups often wear the same types of apparel and accessories (62-64). In another study of identity in figured worlds, Jennifer Kelly, Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, Canada, draws strong connections between teenagers' choices in music and their identification with (or membership in) a particular social group (68). These studies show how the items we buy and put on display are cues to our identities and affiliations with various social groups.

Additionally, language usage, such as vocabulary, dialect,

accent, and slang also marks individuals as insiders or outsiders of any given social group. James Paul Gee describes this as "social language"—a particular way of using language that constructs a socially situated identity (41). It is easy to recognize the jargon of doctors or lawyers, the doublespeak of marketers, and the slang of sports fanatics, for instance. In these ways, language acts as a cue to the "kind of person" a speaker may be (Gee 42).

Language is also used to tell stories about our experiences in various figured worlds. In fact, some would say that stories are key to identity construction because through verbal accounts we are able to shape and reshape who we are. For instance, identity is tied to the plot of our stories, to the cultural backdrop of our stories, and to our relationships with other characters within our stories (Chappell, Rhodes, Soloman, Tennant, & Yates 45-56; Zembylas 215). Moreover, we grow to understand our own identities through the stories we tell as they mediate our experiences, thoughts, and behaviors, and we construct for others a particular identity.

Stories are inevitably shaped by the narrator's voice and personal perspective. As Jerome Bruner points out, narratives cannot be "voiceless" (*Acts of Meaning* 77) or "point-of-view-less" (*Narrative Construction* 5). Rather, listeners hear stories through one perspective, the narrator's, which is naturally sympathetic to his or her own situation and experience. Bruner describes the narrator's voice as a "personal prism" through which events are both seen and retold (*Acts of Meaning* 54), whereby "the narrator … usually comes off best" (*Acts of Meaning* 96). Moreover, narratives typically do more than recount what happened—they "meet the condition on 'so what'" as they justify beliefs, values, and actions conveyed through story (Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 86). Thus, as narrators tell stories about themselves, they also expose who they are, what they believe, how they feel, what they value, and how they view the world (Rymes 23-24). In this sense, the construction of one's identity becomes "'dialogue dependent,' designed … for the recipient of [one's] discourse" (Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 101).

Narratives have the ability to both represent and consti-

tute reality. As narrators tell stories, they share a "version of reality" (Bruner, *Narrative Construction* 4) that listeners' accept because they are typically familiar with the culture in which a narrative exists. Bruner cites two examples, one seemingly bizarre and the other mundane. First is the famous radio broadcast of *The War of the Worlds* in which Orson Welles skillfully convinced listeners to accept the outlandish tale of a Martian invasion. Second are the narratives that are "so socially conventional, … so in keeping with the canon" that listeners readily accept them without question (*Narrative Construction* 9). This includes simple accounts of happenings in one's daily life, which are often compiled or "accrued" into what anthropologists recognize as "something variously called a 'culture' or a 'history' or more loosely, a 'tradition'" (Bruner, *Narrative Construction* 18). In this way, then, narratives also constitute reality.

Collecting Data

This study—a qualitative study utilizing ethnographic methods—took place in a first year, required composition course at St. James University (SJU),[1] a private university in Minnesota. For one full semester, I attended "Jack's" early morning class as an observer-participant (Wolcott 44). In this role, I audio-recorded and transcribed each class session, took extensive field notes, collected artifacts (such as students' papers and Jack's assignment sheets), and conducted eighteen interviews with each of the participants: six with Jack and three with each of the four students (Alice, Becky, Mark, and Judy) who volunteered to participate in my study. I also joined in class discussion or group activities when invited to do so, but I resisted voluntarily contributing to class discussion, no matter how intriguing the topic seemed.

I was not—nor have I ever been—an instructor at SJU, but, like most researchers, I did have an "in" to the classroom I

1 Names of people and places within this article are pseudonyms.

observed. Several years ago, Jack and I had worked together as adjunct instructors at a different university. When I was looking for a study site and participants, I contacted several former colleagues and asked for volunteers; Jack was the first to respond, so I looked no further. This was a good decision as Jack turned out to be extremely generous with his time, apparently comfortable with my presence, and willing to discuss both pedagogy and practice. I remain indebted to him for his generosity.

> The students in Jack's class seemed to be a fair representation of SJU's student population as a whole. According to their website at the time of my study, only 17% of the 3800 students attending SJU were not Minnesotan, and fewer than 4% were classified as "multicultural" or "international." Thus it is not surprising that all eighteen of the students in Jack's class were white, Euro-Americans, and only two of them were from out of state. Additionally, the ten female and eight male students that made up the total student population in the figured world of Jack's class were traditional college age.

At the end of the academic term, I began analyzing my data, identifying recurring themes and hand-coding them. In my examination of the way that Jack constructed his identity, the single most important detail that stood out for me was that Jack told numerous stories—eighty-four of them, in fact, during the single semester that I observed him.

I extracted Jack's narratives and examined them separately. Narratives, in this case, comprised of "a simple orientation, a linear depiction with a precipitating event, a resolution, and sometimes a coda" (Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 83). Interestingly, Jack was aware that he told a lot of stories to his class. In fact, he claimed to use narratives for rhetorical purposes. However, as I analyzed his narratives, I soon discovered that almost all of them involved people close to him. Upon even closer examination, Jack's narratives could be separated into categories that focused on his ancestors (parents and grandparents), spouse, or children. Undoubtedly, his relationships with all of these people influence his identity and thus his interests, viewpoint, and classroom

decisions, but one of these stands out as more influential than the rest: his identity as a spouse.

Jack's Identity

Jack constructed his identity in many different ways. Above all, he performed the role of instructor in the figured world of the college composition classroom. That is, he carried books from his office to the classroom, read from them, and discussed them with students; he lectured with supplementary materials relevant to the topics he covered in class; he assigned students' papers, which he then read and assessed; and so on. In short, he could be recognized as a "teacher."

Jack further constructed his teacher identity as casual and approachable. For instance, he wore blue jeans or khaki pants and casual shirts instead of business type clothes or suits. On the few occasions he wore a necktie, it was a casual one decorated with cartoon characters and always worn with jeans. He consistently wore white tennis shoes. By appearance, Jack never seemed pretentious. His attire was clean and tidy, but certainly far from stuffy.

Additionally, Jack's mannerisms contributed to his identity as casual. He did not sit or stand in any one place for more than five minutes at a time. Instead, Jack paced forward and back, side to side, in the open space at the front of the classroom. When he stopped, he often leaned against the wall at either the front or side of the classroom. Other times he would sit behind—or atop—the larger, teacher's desk at the front of the room or atop an empty student desk in the front row. Jack continuously moved around. His goal was to appear less intimidating than the college instructors he remembered "standing up in front" of the classes he took (Interview One). Although Jack unfailingly positioned himself in traditional style in front of students (as opposed to mingling among them), he nonetheless worked very hard to construct his identity as casual or nonchalant rather than formal or stodgy.

Moreover, on the rare occasions when Jack remained in one place, he gestured a great deal, which made him appear

animated and exuberant. For instance, when narrating personal stories, Jack often flailed his arms over his head in exaggerated motions or flapped them wildly at his sides. When his arms happened to be still, his hands stayed busy playing with pen caps, tapping on the desk, lifting a coffee cup to his mouth, or fidgeting with the classroom computer's remote control. Remarkably, he did not appear nervous. Rather, he seemed to have an abundance of energy and an enthusiasm for whatever he was discussing. This further promoted Jack's identity as friendly and approachable—and at times, even comical.

However, what stood out in Jack's performance was his uncanny penchant for storytelling. Once, when I had asked him why he told so many stories, Jack replied that he used narratives to help students "relate to [him] in the classroom personally" (Interview One). While Jack often relied on the personal as an entrance to reading and writing topics, he also told numerous stories that had no relevance to what he was teaching. It was through my analysis of the stories Jack told that I uncovered an unexpected link between Jack's identity and his classroom practices.

Connecting Jack's Identity to his Classroom Practices

Without fail, every day that class met, Jack told at least one narrative to his students. His stories varied in length and occurred at different times throughout the class period. Most often, the first story occurred within seconds of his arrival, and typically his stories recounted an event or conversation that he had experienced with a family member or friend. The very fact that he told so many stories constructed his identity as a social person—one who builds rapport with his students by sharing entertaining anecdotes about himself. Through his stories, however, students learned a great deal more. For instance, they learned that Jack is a father because he talked about what his children were doing in their classes, at home, and in their extra-curricular activities. They found that Jack is an actively involved father because he told stories about the ways he helped

his children with sports, assisted with school projects, and enforced disciplinary measures when necessary. They knew he is married because he spoke frequently about his wife, "Jackie." They knew that Jack has a dog because he complained about its eating habits and the challenges of training it. In short, through the narratives Jack told to the class, students were introduced to Jack's home life, parents, siblings, grandparents, friends, colleagues, former teachers, and former classmates. Without coming right out and saying so, through these stories, he also informed listeners of his social class, approximate age, interests, concerns, and ambitions.

Jack comes from an upper-middle class environment and he maintains that status today. He narrated stories about his parents and grandparents, all of whom earned a college education in an era when many (women especially) were not afforded such opportunity. He told stories about his own college education, explaining his parents' high expectations of him as a student attending a private university. He painted a picture of an idyllic, privileged childhood: he grew up with three siblings yet had his own room; he was raised by a mother and father in a house on a lake; he rode his bicycle to and from school on a dirt road with little traffic and fewer worries; his family had dinner together and used that time to discuss literature. Today, he drives an SUV, owns a home, is married with two children and a dog, and attends church regularly. Jack could be the poster child for middle American life; he appears to have accomplished the American Dream. All of this and more was gleaned purely through the eighty-four stories he told over the course of thirty-two class meetings.

Just as Jack had hoped, his narratives acted functionally within the classroom, creating for him an identity as a congenial teacher. Time and again, the participating students described him as "friendly" (Becky, Mark), "relaxed" (Becky, Alice), "nice" (Judy, Mark), and "upbeat and personable" (Alice). While narratives in this case worked to construct Jack's identity as friendly, the content of his narratives—as with any narrative—also constructed a social and cultural identity and revealed

personal views, opinions, and beliefs.

Although listeners learned a lot about Jack's identity through his stories, Jack claimed to use them for other purposes. In an early interview, Jack explained that he used stories intentionally "as an introduction—an entrance to the corporate" (Interview One). He elaborated, "I have a general storehouse of personal examples that I try to use throughout the semester for various topics, and I have some written down on my daily plan. Others just come out…. If I forget to use them—if I don't write them down—then I'm mad at myself, and I try to use them the next time, and it doesn't work. I use them purposefully" (Interview One). Sometimes, Jack's stories were used as links between literature and real life. Other times, his stories were meant to demonstrate how to be a good (or bad) student. And still other times, Jack's stories merely broke the ice first thing in the morning or livened up the classroom when students seemed quiet or sleepy. Regardless whether his narratives were meant as a teaching tool, an icebreaker, or as entertainment, they nonetheless provided students a window to his identity.

Most revealing were the narratives that constructed Jack's identity as spouse to Jackie, a politically powerful woman. In fact, the majority of Jack's stories about Jackie shared a common theme: her role as an elected county official. And it was this identity—this connection to power and to the legal system—that influenced many of his curriculum decisions.

For instance, the first time that Jack referred to his wife in class, he said, "My wife is a prosecutor," and then, as if to explain exactly what such a job entails, he added, " She gets bad guys" (class transcript, September 12). From the start, students knew that Jack's wife is a lawyer, a woman with an authoritative position, but two class periods later he exposed the extent of her authority by elaborating, "My dear wife is the chief jurisdiction in this county" (class transcript, September 20). Jack's use of an endearment in this reference to his wife—followed by a description of her position—constructs Jack as the confidant, consultant, and best friend to a regionally powerful woman. Jack also constructed himself as proud of Jackie's accomplishments

and supportive of her career. He led her campaign, organized constituents to march in parades, and helped create media materials (interviews). In class, he spoke of her success and his encouragement of her career. In the following anecdote, Jack recalls a phone conversation with Jackie, who was out of town on business. Through this brief narrative, he is able to demonstrate both her success and his encouragement and pride:

> …I called and told Jackie [the news that a chief justice of the state supreme court had resigned] and she said, "I'm going to apply!" Wouldn't that be fun! To be married to the Supreme Court Justice! I think that would be fun! (Jack, class transcript, September 30)

Jack appeared enthusiastic at the prospect of being married to a justice of the state supreme court. Moreover, he indicated joy in the auxiliary role that he occupies. He is pleased to be married to the "chief jurisdiction of this county," and he thinks it would be "fun" if she held an even more powerful position.

Jack's enthusiasm for Jackie's position seeped into the classroom in other ways too. In fact, at times it actually seemed that Jack *assumed* a bit of his wife's identity in his classroom practices. For instance, Jack adopted a part of his wife's identity as a law enforcement official when he connected class discussions and writing assignments to legal issues. During a discussion of Poe's "Cask of Amontillado," for example, Jack asked students if it is "just [i.e. fair or morally right] to make perpetrators suffer to the same extent as they made their victims suffer" (class transcript, October 6). Clearly, justice is an issue prosecutors take into account and ask jurors to consider. And like a prosecutor, Jack continued along this line of questioning. He asked, "Did the punishment here—fear—fit the crime? … Is it a crime if a perpetrator doesn't get caught? *Is it a crime*?" (class transcript, October 6).

While certainly a thought-provoking inquisition, such questions do not typically accompany this particular short story. With the slow and deliberate repetition of his primary question

(*"Is it a crime?"*), Jack seemed to be grilling his students much like a lawyer would a jury. Moreover, Jack's non-verbal cues also imitated a lawyer's actions within a courtroom. For instance, throughout the discussion, he sat behind a desk in front of the class and tapped the eraser-tipped end of a pencil on the desktop (field notes). Thus, Jack both sounded and acted like a stereotypical lawyer: sitting in front of a jury, ready with a pencil, absent-mindedly but nervously tapping, all the while driving his crucial points home to the jury who must determine when "punishment" (in this case, revenge) crosses the line and becomes a crime.

Additionally, in the middle of this particular class discussion, Jack clarified for his students the distinguishing features of first and second-degree murder: "First degree murder is planned. 'I'm going to kill you, and this is how I am going to do it'" (class transcript, October 6). Jack then referred to a local high-profile case of two high-school aged boys who were on trial for murder. Jackie's office had been handling their cases, and the verdicts had just recently come in: guilty of first-degree murder. Jack continued, "Second degree murder is like, this is a crime of passion. Two people are having an argument and it escalates. One person hits another and breaks his neck and kills him. That is second degree murder" (class transcript, October 6). Jack's explanation and use of legal jargon contributed to his adopted identity of lawyer. He confidently differentiated each of the possible charges so that his jury of students was better positioned to condemn or exonerate the defendant—in this case, Poe's Montresor, in "Cask of Amontillado."

Students then discussed the story, determined the nature of the fictionalized crime, and contemplated what constitutes "just punishment" (class transcript, October 6). Even at the end of the class period, Jack's performance mirrored a lawyer's. In his closing remarks, Jack explained to his students that a guilty conscience is bothersome—but as he wrapped up the discussion, he asked students to deliberate, "Is guilt a punishment?" (Jack, class transcript, October 6). Although Jack, in his role as instructor, tied his line of questioning to a well-known piece of

literature, he nonetheless sounded very much like a prosecuting attorney imploring his jury to ponder important philosophical concepts related to the interpretation of law before arriving at a verdict.

In this way, while Jack performed the role of teacher he also performed an adopted identity as lawyer. As teacher, he conducted class discussion. He asked thought-provoking, seemingly open-ended questions that tied to a literary work that the class had read. However, Jack's unique approach to Poe's short story also provided him an opportunity to exhibit profound knowledge of the judicial system, intimate awareness of high-profile legal cases, and the ability to lead his "jury" of students through a sequence of questions intended to assist them in rendering a decision sympathetic to his own point of view.

Jack also performed his adopted identity as lawyer in half (two out of four) of his writing assignments. In an assignment titled "Short Essay #2," Jack asked students to examine the evolution of law by comparing and contrasting current laws in the *St. James University Student Handbook* to the ancient laws of Hammurabi. He began the assignment by disclosing his own interest in legal issues and by assuming that students are equally intrigued. He said, "*We* [italics added] are fascinated with the law as evidenced by the number of television shows such as 'Law and Order,' 'CSI,' 'NYPD Blue,' 'Matlock,' 'Perry Mason,' and now an entire network—'Court TV.' …What is *our* [italics added] fascination with 'rules of conduct'?" (Jack, "Short Essay #2"). Jack's use of the plural indicates his assumption that his students are interested in the topic of law, but of course this is not necessarily true. He cannot know for sure if his students are "fascinated" with the topic of law. But he does know whether or not he is interested in the topic of law, and he exposes his attitude by including himself in his use of the plural pronouns *we* and *our*. He is, essentially, admitting his own interests in this statement, as that is the only thing he can be sure of.

Jack goes on to explain that the purpose of the assignment is to draw connections between modern and ancient laws and their consequences. To accomplish this task, students were

required to read both the *St. James University Student Handbook* and the *Code of Hammurabi*, a document found online at Yale Law School. In this assignment, Jack asks students to select three specific, yet similar, laws in each of the documents and then to analyze the consequences for breaking each law in both modern and ancient times. Students were expected to think critically and to "take a stand" in their papers ("Short Essay #2"). As he went over the assignment in class, he further explained, "The letter of the law is different than the reality of the law" (Jack, class transcript, October 4).

An argument might be made that asking students to think critically about laws (and the consequences for breaking them) is asking them to think critically about citizenship, public policy, and morality—none of which would be considered atypical topics for first-year composition. But the parameters of this assignment–specifically, that students were required to examine rulebooks—limit its appeal to those interested in studying legal documents. By soliciting papers on this unique and very specific topic, Jack again displayed his interest in the study of law and constructed his identity as vicarious lawyer. Moreover, his comment about "the letter of the law" being "different than the reality of the law" exposed an insider's perspective, for Jack has vicariously experienced the fine discrepancies between laws that are found in print and laws as they are enforced in a courtroom.

In another example, the assignment for "Short Essay #4," Jack revisits his interest in a topic he had earlier mentioned: power. After the class had read and discussed selected definition-style essays, Jack created a writing assignment in which he asked students to create "a working definition of power" and to identify the "most powerful person in the world" (Jack, "Short Essay #4"). By itself, the nature of this assignment is insignificant. However, when tied to ideas he had previously mentioned, Jack's interest in power and identity becomes apparent. Recall Jack's previous reference to his wife's position as "prosecutor" and as "chief jurisdiction in this county." Recall also Jack's enthusiastic narrative about the possibility of his wife applying for the newly vacated position of chief justice of the state supreme court.

When considering these stories along with this assignment, it appears that Jack constructs an identity as one concerned with the concepts of power and identity. With this assignment, too, Jack brings his personal interests into the classroom and again merges two of his identities: teacher and husband of a politically powerful woman.

Considering the Consequences

It is important to consider the ways in which our identity influences the decisions we make in the classroom. Although we may perform identities suitable to the various figured worlds we inhabit, our performances are inextricably influenced by our roles outside of a given figured world and by identities we experience vicariously. As this unexpected discovery shows, identity is not neatly compartmentalized.

Rather, our performance and our stories, while seemingly suitable to a particular environment, allow us to create multifaceted identities. In this case, Jack's identity as the spouse of a prosecuting attorney *informed* his teacher identity. His familiarity with the legal system and enthusiasm for courtroom drama influenced his interpretation of literary works, led to discussions on legal issues, and inspired writing assignments that examined law and power. Although Jack's performance within the college composition classroom certainly fulfilled the expectations of his role as teacher in this figured world, his performance also incorporated cultural models and experiences outside of academia. That is, through language and actions, he performed the role of teacher, but he also adopted a bit of his spouse's identity as a legal authority.

Like many teachers, Jack was unaware how much story, voice, and experience—lived or vicarious—influenced the curriculum decisions he made. He was well aware of the teacherly tasks he accomplished: leading discussion, creating assignments, assessing student work, and so on. He was also cognizant of his efforts to be the best teacher he could be: building rapport with students through the stories he told, opening a window that allowed others to see who he was beyond the classroom, and

readily sharing his thoughts and beliefs with students. But he was unaware of the extent to which his interests and experience as spouse to a prosecuting attorney influenced the way he went about performing the role of teacher.

This study suggests that some teachers unknowingly incorporate vicarious experience into their classroom identities. In particular, this study reveals how knowledge gleaned from intimate relationships with others influenced one teacher's approach to classroom materials, his invention of classroom assignments, and the strategies he used to engage students. Teachers need to be more aware of the vicarious experiences and ulterior identities we bring to the classroom and the way these influence pedagogy and practice. As we come to realize what motivates us and inspires our teaching, we can only become better in the roles that we occupy.

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Discovering Landscape with(out) Photographs

G. St. John Stott

The knowledge of authorial audiences

Challenged to explain the language of his poem "Un coup de dès" (1897), Stéphane Mallarmé famously responded that poetry was made of words, not ideas—and one can hardly disagree. But words (usually) have referents, and authors (usually) expect their readers both to know what these referents are and to bring that knowledge to their reading. Even Mallarmé, setting out to reduce words to sound and spaces, probably knew that he could not use lexis from a known language without readers presuming that they knew the meaning of the words he chose.

What is probably true for authors of symbolist poetry is certainly so for authors of novels, and indeed is something they rely on. Meaning is "caught up . . . in context," Adorno observed (47), and novelists presume that readers will be aware of this. As Peter J. Rabinowitz suggested in an important article published some thirty years ago, there are at least four audiences implied in any narrative literary text, and the second of these (what he calls the authorial audience) is made up those who have the "beliefs, knowledge, and familiarity with conventions" presumed by authors in writing their works ("Truth" 126). Authors write with this audience in mind, and efficient readers have membership.

Sometimes what readers are expected to bring to a text is simply defined: a knowledge of history, perhaps (Cervantes,

for example, presumed that his readers knew the significance of Sancho Panza's boasting that he was an "old Christian"), or a knowledge of geography (as when Shakespeare presumed that at least some in the audience for *Cymbeline* would know the location of Milford Haven); the kind of knowledge that, if they do not have it, they can always hope to discover by checking footnotes or doing their own research. But sometimes an author presumes not just a knowledge of place (or geographical location) but a sense of place—not just a knowledge of where X is, but a sense of what it means to live there; and, as with the historical and geographical references, if we do not have that knowledge, if we are not in the authorial audience, then our understanding is incomplete. In the words of Christiane Nord, in such a situation we are merely "an observer listening to the conversation of two strange parties" (50).

Helpful here is an example discussed by Benedict Anderson. If we read Mas Marco Kartodikromo's *Semarang Hitam* (published serially in 1924) as members of the authorial audience, "we-the-Indonesian-readers" are "plunged immediately into . . . a familiar landscape"; so familiar indeed that "some of us may well have walked [Kartodikromo's] 'sticky' Semarang roads" (Anderson 32). But if we are not Indonesian readers, and cannot easily imagine the novel's "shops, offices, carriages, kampungs, and gas lamps"—if we do not even know why Semarang roads <u>are</u> sticky—we have work to do. As Rabinowitz noted in a later article, to the extent that we do not take on the characteristics of the authorial audience (including, I suggest, a sense of place), "our reading experience will be more or less seriously flawed" ("Where" 5).

The task we face is not easy, of course. Place, as Marc Augé has reflected, is "relational, historical and concerned with identity" (77-78)—and if we cannot claim this triplet for ourselves, we need approximate it by bringing together "the historical and the contemporary, the political and the poetic, the discursive and the sensual; . . . oral testimony, anthology, memoir, biography, natural history and everything you might ever want to say about [a given location]" (Pearson and Shanks 64-

65). Doing so allows us to construct what Augé calls a fiction of anthropological place, and to begin to understand what the authorial audience already knows. The task is not easy, however, and in what follows I discuss some of the difficulties it entails by turning to a novel better known to most readers of *MEJ* than *Semarang Hitam*, and therefore more suited to my purposes: Wilkie Collins' runaway best-seller of 1860, *The Woman in White*.

Sense of place in *The Woman in White*

Collins' novel is organized around three spatial centers: Limmeridge House in Cumberland (now Cumbria), Blackwater Park in Hampshire, and a series of addresses in London; and each one contributes to the novel's thematic development. As it happens, we can possibly point to an original for Limmeridge House: Hayton Castle, the only village manor-house Collins would have passed when he and Dickens visited the Cumberland coast in 1857. (They had left the Maryland and Carlisle Railway at Aspatria, and passed through the village of Hayton on their way to the Ship Inn at Allonby where they stayed.) We can't do the same for Blackwater Park: although Collins might have been thinking of Braemore House (near Fordingham, south of Salisbury) there is no clear evidence for this, and Collins' amusement when someone wrote to him claiming to be the owner of the "real" Blackwater Park (Robinson 153-54) should serve as caution against taking architectural detective work too seriously. Even in the case of Limmeridge we should not think that Collins was describing Hayton Castle, or doing more than thinking of something like it, in something like its location.

This is the first problem we face. We are trying to gain a sense of place for places that do not exist, for places within a fiction are fictional objects, even when they reference real-world locations. They cease to be the kind of places we know—the products of social and economic forces—and become instead something imagined and therefore imaginary (Roudaut 39). And yet, to return to the point made earlier, without some sense of real-world location (some sense anthropological place) we can

hardly make sense of the geography of the novel—and clearly Collins wanted us to do so. After all, we can trace Walter Hartright's steps on the fateful night he met Anne Catherick: he crosses Hampstead Heath, joins the Finchley Road, and continues "by the western side of the Regent's Park" towards the City (14). Even if the "London" of *The Woman in White* is not really London, as Roudaut would insist, Collins counted on readers recognizing the one in the other, and bringing their knowledge of real-world London to their reading of his text. He expected them to know, for example, what kind of place Hampstead was; or to appreciate the significance of Count Fosco's renting property in St. John's Wood—a suburb that was "pretty, high-class, but decidedly shady," as Sucksmith points out (Collins, *Woman* 617), and noted for the seclusion of its residences (Clark); even to be able to make sense of the scene, late in the novel, where Fosco "stopped at a pastrycook's" at the entrance to Regent's Park.

In this passage Fosco "went in (probably to give an order), and came out again immediately with a tart in his hand. An Italian was grinding an organ before the shop, and a miserable little shrivelled monkey was sitting on the instrument." With "grotesque tenderness" the Count gives the monkey some of the tart, but he contemptuously denies the organ-grinder's request for assistance (527-28). Obviously enough, the scene is important to our understanding of Fosco—but what exactly <u>is</u> the scene? Is the street empty but for the organ-grinder and his monkey (as in Tissot's 1878 engraving, "Le joueur d'orgue"), or was the entrance to the Regent's Park, the pastrycook's location, a popular site for entertainers—the "Punch-shows, and monkey-shows; hurdy-gurdies, and ground and lofty tumblers" that we know were found in London's streets (Tait 18)? Was it that Fosco could not avoid seeing the organ-grinder, or that he selected him (or at least his monkey) from several candidates for benevolence?

These are not the only questions we need to ask about the scene, of course. At the least we should also wonder about the significance of Fosco's ignoring his compatriot. Should we

regard it as a matter of class, or of musical taste—on a par with Carlyle's hiding in the garden to avoid "a scandalous Italian beggar . . . grinding his abominable organ under my window" (20); or should we think of it as more problematic? Collins was no doubt aware of the habit of Gabriele Rossetti (the father of the poet) of interrogating every Italian he met: "Hardly an organ-man or plaster-cast vendor passed our street-door without being interrogated by my father, '*Di che paese siete?*' ('What part of Italy do you come from?')" (Rossetti 46; Collins knew Rossetti, and may have based one of the novel's characters on him); and it could therefore be significant that Fosco, a spy charged with monitoring the Italian community in England, did not do likewise. But to understand the scene we have to be able to see it first—and it seems reasonable to suppose that Collins expected that at least some of his readers could.

If that is the case, then it also seems reasonable to suppose that Collins also expected his readers to apply real-world knowledge to the novel's Hampshire and Cumberland scenes. Not a knowledge of streets and buildings, their spatial relationships and their populations; that should go without saying. When he came to refer to Allonby in *No Name* (1862), he would only expect the most general geographical knowledge of his readers (for example, that Scotland could easily be reached from the coast of Cumberland), and there is no reason to think that he expected anything else of them two years before. But he did count on them having a sense of what it would be like to live at Limmeridge House and Blackwater Park, for these houses and their landscapes become charged with significance as the plot unfolds. As Eudora Welty noted, fictional places can become credible gathering spots "of all that has been felt . . . in [a work's] progress" (122), and so it is in *The Woman in White*. Readers have to discover this focalization and localization of significance as they move through its pages.

Marian's landscapes

The story of Laura Fairlie (one of the three that Collins keeps before us in *The Woman in White*) begins and ends at Lim-

meridge, but the conspiracy against her is conceived and begun at Blackwater Park, and Collins allows us to anticipate the dangers that will face Laura there through the reactions of her half-sister, Marian Halcombe, when she moves from Cumberland to Hampshire. Marian finds Blackwater Park to be "the exact opposite" of Limmeridge (171). "The house is situated on a dead flat, and seems to be shut in—almost suffocated, to my north-country notions, by trees," she writes of her new home, thinking of the Limmeridge countryside as she does (177). Lacking the open space of the fells (what Laura calls "the friendly hills of Cumberland" [235]), it seems a threatening environment.

By this point in the novel we have probably recognized its Gothic qualities, and our reaction to Blackwater's threat is in part intertextual. This is our second problem. We expect the estate to figure some of the less amiable of qualities its owner, Sir Percival Glyde—and of course Collins counted on this. (In case we miss the point he introduces the theme of "the picturesque," and lets us note how the "still, stagnant" Blackwater lake, surrounded by thick stands of trees that "shut out the view, and cast their black shadows on the sluggish, shallow water" [184], violated principles of landscape gardening [see Smith 67; Price 1:56]. Discovering this can help us realize that something is morally wrong at Blackwater.) But intertextuality is not all: we cannot just class Blackwater Park as a Gothic pile, and stop there, congratulating ourselves on having read Radcliffe or Maturin. We even need to get beyond the echoes of the Brontës in the contrast of north and south, of moors and woods, of bleakness and fertility. Although that is important, it is only part of what preoccupies Marian.

Collins would certainly have been aware of the obvious differences between Cumberland, with its long ridges and gradual open slopes (to Southern eyes a barren landscape, remarkable for its lack of trees), and Hampshire. Dickens's memories of Carrock Fell at dusk (apart from his account of the steepness of the slope that he and Collins had climbed) could be applied to the countryside of the Allonby coast that they had seen. "[D]otted about like spots of faint shadow, the division-lines

which mapped out the fields were all getting blurred together, and the lonely farm-house where the dog-cart had been left, loomed spectral in the grey light like the last human dwelling at the end of the habitable world" (Dickens and Collins 317). As for Hampshire: one of the last painting expeditions of Collins' father had been to enjoy the "quiet, fertile, inland scenery" of Shedfield, some twelve miles north of Southampton, and the description he gave of the countryside he set out to sketch can serve as a summary of what his son had in mind for the countryside around Blackwater Park. (As noted, the Glyde estate itself is darker, more Gothic.) "The bright glimpses of barn and homestead; the winding lane, dappled with the pleasant sunlight shining through tree and hedgerow; the farmyard enclosures, with their toppling pigeon-houses, quaint old dog kennels, and picturesque duck ponds; the cottage gardens, bright with simple English flowers; the old cart road over the common. . ." (*Memoirs* 2:259).

The contrast between these scenes—though perhaps obvious—would have been worth making. In 1858 the Manchester photographer James Mudd, who knew the bleakness of the Pennines and had spent time the previous year photographing trees in Salford, in the western suburbs of Manchester, to provide evidence of environmental damage from industrial waste, would still characterize the pleasures of landscape photography as the ability to capture on film "the shady wood, by the river side, or in the hedgerow, where the wild convolvulus, the bramble and luxuriant fern have arrested us in our wanderings. . . " (39). Mudd knew that Northern realities were different, but promoted other scenes out of respect for conventional ideas about the picturesque and his feeling that "every portion of [a] picture" should be filled "by some object of interest or pictorial value" (45). Collins could have rested content with showing the differences between north and south that Mudd ignored. However, he does not. He focuses instead on the way landscapes are felt as well as seen, and expects us to contrast the suffocating claustrophobia of Blackwater Park, where the view is "shut out . . . on all sides" (181), with the "dry airy" moors of Limmeridge (170).

It is not hard to understand why Marian would talk in this way. Hayton Castle—whose perspective Collins would have seen, and should therefore be taken into account here (whether or not we accept that it was Limmeridge's original)—"stands on a gentle eminence, at the east end of the pleasant village of Hayton, and commands a very extensive prospect over the Frith, and Irish Sea as far as the Isle of Man; and also the borders of Scotland." Thus a guide-book reports (Jollie 2:14; for "Frith" as a variant of *Firth*, see the *OED*). The closed-in darkness of Blackwater Park could have only seemed oppressive and suffocating in contrast. But to understand what Marian says, to appreciate the opposition of ideas in her words (suffocation and airiness, for example), is not to *feel* the opposition. It is not to have a sense of place. "A place is more an *event* than a *thing* to be assimilated to known categories," Casey has written (26)—and if we agree we cannot rest content with comparing and contrasting words. We need to see, and feel, for ourselves.

Forgetting photographs

Having come this far, our next step must seem obvious. If we cannot draw on memories of places like Limeridge and Blackwater, we need to draw on the evidence of photographs (or paintings or engravings) that can stand in such places' stead. If we do, however, we face our third problem. Although we might think that bringing a photograph to a text to clarify what we read, there is a sense in which our actions actually obscure it. Once we focus on a photograph of a place that we read of (or of a scene that represents the features an author has described), the dynamics of our relationship with the place itself changes. We remember the image rather than the original (verbal) description.

Barthes is helpful here. The association of a text with a photograph can burden the image "with a culture, a moral, and imagination," he notes ("Message" 26), and the same process occurs in the movement between image and text. As a result, rather than preserving memory, a photograph blocks it, and becomes instead an anti-memory, "un contre-souvenir" (*Chambre*

142; Theroux makes a similar point in his short piece, "The Cerebral Snapshot"). And just as a photograph of a place we know can block memories of the place itself, so, if it is used to define what a fictional landscape looks like, it can shape the way we read a text, blocking and filtering alternative perception of its scenes. Earlier I referred to the passage in *The Woman in White* where Fosco encounters an organ-grinder at the entrance to Regent's Park, and suggested that the scene was possibly full of life. But because I know the engraving I mentioned, I see the organ-grinder in an empty suburban street. There is no park, no pastry-cook's, in what I see; no Fosco, even. Tissot trumps Collins—and inevitably so. No story or explanation offered for what is shown in a photograph is ever "quite as present as the banal appearances preserved in [it]" (Berger 86)—and what is more "present" is inevitably foregrounded. When a photograph (or in this case, an engraving) is tied to a story, we prioritize the visual imagery and reduce the importance of the story itself.

This is a familiar problem for those who enjoy film or TV adaptations of novels, and end up remembering the adaptation as the original work. (Chatsworth makes a fine Pemberley, but once the camera pans across its exterior there is a danger of our remembering too much, too sharply.) But it is not a new one. Wordsworth would complain when the reality of Mt. Blanc replaced what his imagination had led him to anticipate--when "a soulless image . . . usurped upon a living thought / That never more could be" (*The Prelude*, Bk 6, ll. 452-6)—and though the parallel is not exact, since he would have had some ideas about the Alps, perhaps have even seen engravings of them, whereas we are supposing a situation where we have no idea what Mt Blanc or Pemberley (or Limmeridge House) could look like, we can sympathize with his disappointment and recognize our danger.

Of course, when we are conscious of thinking too precisely we can try to self-correct, but often we are unaware of what is happening—the distortions introduced are often less obvious than those in my example, and we do not recognize how the details we remember from a photograph change the text we

are trying to understand. And that is troubling. As Alexander Nehamas points out, to change a detail of a work is to cascade change throughout a text, thereby creating another work (165). Nehemas, drawing on Nietzsche, was thinking of how to take away even a single detail is to create a world of changes—but, I would suggest, it is no less dangerous to add a detail to the author's work. Again Barthes is helpful. "[I]n differing degrees," he reflects, "everything . . . signifies. This is not a matter of art (on the part of the narrator), but of structure; in the realm of discourse, what is noted is by definition notable" (261). As we absorb the details of a photograph in order to understand a text, the *Gestalt* of the text changes. For some readers of *MEJ*, this might not matter. A novel, they might maintain, is created in their reading: its meaning is constructed, not discovered. But even if that is granted, they have a responsibility to master the lexis used and the context presumed. As Patrocinio Schweickart notes, although reading is "necessarily subjective" it must not be entirely so. "One must respect the autonomy of the text. The reader is a visitor and, as such, must observe the necessary courtesies" (80).

This, then, is our problem: if we need a photograph to understand references that would be familiar to the authorial audience, its details need to be part of our background knowledge, not our focus if we are not going let visual imagery control what we read. Paradoxically, to allow for a reading that is not distorted by explicit comparisons between the text and extra-textual resources but is still informed by those resources, the photograph needs to have lost its place in our sensory memory *before* it is used. As Mallarmé suggested—albeit of his introductory Note for "Un coup de dès," not a photograph or engraving illustrating the poem's content—if what was external to the text had to be looked at, it should be merely "glanced at and then actually forgotten" (262).

Such advice is easier to give than to follow, particularly when it comes to visual imagery. After all, we do not usually forget photographs that we have seen. Noting the results of a study in which people were shown 10,000 pictures over five days, the

cognitive psychologist Lionel Standing calculated that people retain short-term memories of 98% of pictures that they see, and would still recognize over 73% after a year. Yet to recognize a scene is not the same as to remember its details—and although we are trying to avoid the recall of details that would be read into a text, we do not need these details for recognition. We can "know" a scene as we read an author's description without "seeing" it (Kosslyn and Jolicoeur); in theory, at least, we can draw upon knowledge we already have without being overwhelmed by its specificity, and that, we might presume, was what Mallarmé had in mind.

Teaching landscape

So much might be granted in theory, but glancing at, forgetting, and then recalling the gist of an image seems a tall order when we know its importance to our understanding of a text. If alerted to the fact that an image has significance, we notice and remember its details even if even alerted through a prohibition. If we go in search of photographs that can inform our reading, they will control our understanding.

However, although the danger seems unavoidable, we might consider what the implications are for teaching the novels—and then work back to ourselves. When we do not know that an image is important, and therefore do not flag it any way, when its photograph is just one among many seen, the task of remembering the gist but not the details of a scene is feasible. As the neurologist Antonio Damasio has reminded us, "The brain does not file Polaroid pictures of people, objects, landscapes" (100)—or of photographs, we might add. What we remember is a "reconstructed version" of our experience, not a record of what we saw, and the level of detail in the reconstruction will reflect the attention paid to the stimulus. Indeed, recent memory research (reported by Brainerd and Reyna) has suggested that we store the details of what we experience in a "verbatim" trace, and the gist or meaning of it in a "fuzzy" one, and that because the former fades more quickly than the latter, the essence of the experience remains with us even when its details are forgotten.

The implications for the classroom should be obvious. There is more than enough to show students about Cumberland landscapes without us having to draw particular attention to photos of Hayton and Allonby; more than enough to explain about New Forest villages (important for Elizabeth Gaskell's *North and South* as well as Collins' novel) without drawing attention to one of them as "Blackwater" (or "Helstone"). Likewise, we can easily trace Collins' residences in London and note the differences between Hampstead and St. John's Wood, without creating a virtual blue plaque to announce "Count Fosco lived here." In this scenario, when students turn to the novel they will only have a fuzzy recall of the photographs that they have seen—but that is all that they will need as members of an authorial audience, and approaching the task this way there is less danger that the photograph's point of view, framing, and detail could come to be mistaken for that of the author. Although they will only have a fuzzy recall of what they have seen, that is all that they will need to be able to read as members of an authorial audience.

Can *we* discover fictional landscapes in this way—by drawing on fuzzy traces rather than verbatim ones? Probably not if our curiosity to learn about the world of Laura and Marian takes us to regional histories of the Allonby coast or on walking tours of the fells; but that is perhaps no great matter if we read with sufficient attention. Besides, what is in sharp relief (and possibly a source of distortion) for the *Woman in White* will have a softer focus when we turn to *No Name*, and will be suitably fuzzy when we discover Wordsworth's Cumberland and its "wild, unpeopled hills." And if our curiosity is more general, we explore contexts just for their interest, without forcing connections, and trusting that our mind can do the job when necessary we can even approximate the classroom dynamics described above. "The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows," David Ausubel reminds us (iv); and if we believe this and confidently store up discoveries against future need, we can come close to the scenario described, and a little bit closer to what the authorial audience knows and the way that they know it. There is a final danger, here, of course:

that of hubris. We cannot really know in the way the authorial audience's knew, any more we can really know what it was that they knew. Both tasks are impossible to achieve. But they are also impossible to refuse.

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Seduction, Abandonment, and Sorcery in Middle English Lyrics

Nickie Kranz

Loue is a selkud wodenesse.[1]

"Amor vincit omnia" (love conquers all) is a well-known expression that was recited passionately in medieval culture with voice, with pen, and, as John Cherry posits, even with tools, as it was often inscribed on medieval brooches (7). In medieval literature, this expression was coupled with the euphoric image of medieval courtly love. However, the concept of courtly love, so popular in medieval literature, is not the sole basis of the Middle English lyrics. In fact, many of the lyrics portray love in a very different way. The lyrics that are the focus of this article are not about courtly love; instead, they are concerned with a single woman's feelings of rejection, anger, fear of unfaithfulness, and fear of pregnancy. The women in these lyrics are seduced and then abandoned. Oftentimes, they react to this abandonment by using magic. Magic becomes a tool with which women respond to the expectations society placed upon them.

My purpose in writing this article is to expose a different view of romantic relationships that exist in medieval literature,

1 Love is an extraordinary madness.

a view that is in opposition to courtly love. My intention is to encourage high school English teachers to incorporate these lyrics into a lesson plan because studying them is an imaginative, entertaining approach to get students interested in medieval culture. The relationship issues these characters wrestle with are present in relationships today. Students will be able to relate to those problems and, thus, find themselves relating to songs that were written hundreds of years ago. Young adults will be drawn to the irrational behavior of the characters; these individuals blame others for their own mistakes, and they consider blame to be a logical and acceptable means of managing a difficult situation. These characters and the situations they find themselves in are entertaining, and the magic, secrecy, infatuation, and jealousy these poems contain are all timeless plot devices that have captivated the human mind through the ages.

In the lyrics, magical power most often exists in the form of curses. The Middle English lyrics that contain references to curses are not necessarily about magic, and understanding that is imperative. Magic is not central to the plots of these lyrics; the focus is the psychological state of the woman, and magic simply serves as an indicator of that state. Instead, the focus is on an inward state of mind, which is just as mysterious as any magic.

Single lower–class females in England during the Middle Ages were expected to fill two contrasting roles simultaneously: that of the sensual, uninhibited woman, and that of the demure, virginal maiden. The importance of virginity in medieval culture is strongly linked to the Virgin Mary, who was the focal point of Christianity. As a result, medieval people glorified womanhood to an extent that had not been witnessed before. In contrast, society also placed heavy emphasis on the sensuality of a single female. A single woman could not simultaneously be a virginal representation of Mary and be a sensual, uninhibited woman. The futile attempt to fill both of these roles had a negative effect on the psyche of single women, and consequently affected their romantic relationships. Out of frustration, they reacted with the use of magic.

A defining factor when constructing the framework of a

single medieval female's sexuality is not what happens before or during the sex, but what happens after the sex; specifically the way in which she reacts to her lover's abandonment after the affair. I intend to examine these lyrics with the purpose of exposing a component previously unstudied in any substantial depth: the belief in and use of magic as a way of reacting to abandonment by a lover. This aspect of sexuality is demonstrated by the female characters in the Middle English lyrics.

It is interesting to study how these women dealt with the anger they felt after abandonment. Since human existence, romantic relationships have involved the natural emotions of passion as well as anger. Both of these emotions cross all cultures, all classes, and all centuries. But how medieval females dealt with these emotions is fascinating because they are connected to magic, and some of the Middle English lyrics illustrate this. I will explain how male seducers relied on magic to induce passion in the women they desired, and how women relied on magic to punish their ex-lovers after abandonment or to explain behaviors.

Turning to a belief in magic as a way to deal with being abandoned exposes a fabulous imagination that is fueled by cultural beliefs. A solid conviction in the existence of magic is the lens through which these women viewed their world, including how they judged the actions of others and of themselves. This may seem to be an extreme, almost surreal worldview, but how they arrived at such a point is easy to understand. One simply has to recall what society expected of them: they were expected to be sensual virgins, an oxymoron at best, and yet they met that expectation not only with willingness but with fervor. Upon consenting to an affair, they expected to receive something in return, whether financial gain, fulfillment of their own desire, or reciprocated love, and those expectations were realized. The women in these lyrics did indeed receive money, sexual fulfillment, or love, so these situations would appear to be the perfect relationships. But these ideal relationships proved only temporary, as these lyrics also reveal that the women's expectations were met for only a brief amount of time. In each lyric that I discuss, the

woman consents to an affair, soon finds herself abandoned, and then resorts to magic either as a tool for seeking revenge or as an explanation for her lover's behavior or for her own. That they turned to the use of sorcery as a means of punishment for the men who abandoned them exposes an impious, vengeful side to the medieval single female. The lyrics illustrate that their arrival at this state was due to the actions of the men who abandoned them.

The lyric "*Now springes the spray*" is narrated by a male who, while passing through unfamiliar woods, can hear a woman singing. Although the sound of her voice is beautiful, the words she is uttering are not. She is singing a curse: "the clot him clinge! / Wai is him i' louve-longinge / Shall libben aye"[2] (8-10). Curiosity peaked, the man follows the sound of her voice and finds the maiden "under a bogh" (14). He immediately asks her why she is singing, and in anger she retorts: "My lemman me haves bihot;[3] / He changes anew" (20-22). This abandoned maiden is clearly enraged. Though the image that the narrator supplies is pastoral -- I fonde hire in an herber swot -- her state of mind is described in direct opposition to the setting. Her mind is racing, reeling, plotting how to punish her lover for abandoning her: "If I may, it shall him rewe[4] / By this day" (23-24). With bitterness and rage, she is reacting to the abandonment by seeking revenge.

Surely phrases similar to "if it is in my power he will regret it" have been uttered by abandoned single women since human existence, so this woman's immediate response is not surprising. What is surprising, though, is that she would think of curses as a justifiable way to react to the situation. It is by no stretch of the imagination certain that this medieval single female had sorcery in mind as a distinctive way to react. This conclusion is reached because she first sings a curse, and knowing

2 May the earth cling to him! / Woe to him who I loved / shall exist forever.

3 My lover promised me true love;

4 If it is in my power, he will regret it.

this culture's belief in and use of magic, it can be safely assumed that it is indeed sorcery to which she is referring.

John Riddle confirms that medieval women relied on spells and curses to punish men. He writes in *Eve's Herbs* that in 1484 a treatise was documented that explored the question of why women were prone to producing magic. Riddle explains that it was concluded that women were "more inclined to superstition, and more fragile than men;" thus they were prone to believing in magic and to attempts to use magic. This treatise includes a list of things women were capable of doing with magic, and the list included "obstructing the generative act by rendering men impotent" (111). Interestingly, all of the capabilities listed in this treatise are somehow linked to sexuality, and this one in particular could be used as revenge against an ex-lover. In reality, putting a curse on a man was conceivable; therefore, accepting the idea that the woman in this lyric could be plotting a serious vengeful act is historically plausible.

It is important to study her choice of words carefully. She will punish him 'if' it is in her power. She is going to make a sincere attempt to punish him, but the word 'if' denotes that she may or may not have the power to do so. Her word choice insinuates that she may have never sought revenge through cursing before, but she knows the possibility exists. This lyric is not about the "may the earth cling to him" curse of her threat that he will regret abandoning her. It is about her desire to have the power to create magic in order to seek revenge. The lyric is about her state of mind and how she handles the situation.

Similar to "*Now springes the spray,*" the lyric "In a frith as I con fare fremede" also has a male narrator who reiterates a conversation he had with a maiden. He recalls how, as he approached her, he was taken aback by her natural beauty. She glistens like gold, and he considers her a prize to be won; he is on a quest for her body. As I will demonstrate, it seems that she has been propositioned before, as she is familiar with the game and how to say no. Upon seeing him leer at her, the maiden immediately instructs him to go away, as the narrator explains:

"Heo me bed go my gates lest hire gremede;"[5] and she gives him a specific reason why he needs to leave: "No kepte heo non hening here"[6] (7-8). This statement, though short, says a great deal about her character; she is confident and is unafraid to speak her mind, even in front of a male stranger. The seducer is not deterred, however, and the two begin a banter in which he makes promises to her that she in turn rejects. He seems to be under the impression that she is a whore who will not hesitate to have sex in exchange for gifts of clothing and protection from "cares and kelde"[7] (11).

Determined to keep him at bay, she rejects his offer of new clothes. The seducer, determined as well, takes a different approach, now promising faithfulness until he grows gray. Because she rejects his offer of clothing, the promise of a lifetime of faithfulness may induce in her a feeling of love for him, and this is his last option of the three. But she does not believe he would be faithful: "sone thou woldest vachen an newe"[8] (31). She launches into the plausible scenario of becoming a mother who is unable to feed her child, and then, much to her horror, "in uch an hyrd ben hated and forhaght"[9] (34) for being a whore, thereby ostracized by her family. She then prophesies that she would have to beg him to remain faithful to her because she would have no other choice but to stay with him. A mother and shunned by society, she would have no other options. She refuses to put herself in the position where she would have to beg a man for anything, and this is not surprising, as her strong, independent personality was established earlier on in the lyric when she did not hesitate in telling him to get away from her because she did not want to hear any insulting suggestions.

After she reiterates that she will not give in "thagh I swore by treuthe and othe"[10] (43), she makes it apparent that

5 She commanded me to go away, lest she become angry.
6 She did not wish to hear any insulting suggestions.
7 Cares and bitter sorrow.
8 Soon you would fetch a new lover.
9 In each household be hated and despised.
10 That I would not consent by truth and oath.

she longs to escape, but escape from exactly what is not clearly stated. I suggest that she wants to escape not only the situation of the moment, but

social constructs in general. She is well aware of their social differences, and knows that, because he is of a higher social class, he has power over her, regardless the strength of her willpower. As Kim Phillips illustrates, "the importance of consciousness of rank… has been paid little attention, which is perhaps surprising when one remembers that social status played as great a role or greater than biological sex in creating categories of licit and illicit sexualities in cultures obsessed with hierarchy" (156). There may be nothing she can do to resist his advances simply because of her social class.

Her seducer responds to her plausible scenario by stressing that, if she would only weigh her options, she would realize that it is better to have the nice clothes and the passion than to end up unhappily married: "Betere is taken a comeliche i' clothe, / In armes to cusse and to cluppe, / then a wrecche iwedded so wrothe"[11] (37-39). He makes it sound as if these are her only two choices: be his mistress or to be married to someone she feels no passion for. He says that it is better in the end to choose new clothes and passion, because they are well worth the risk compared to the alternative.

The line immediately following the seducer and the maiden's prophecies is "thagh he me slowe, ne might I him asluppe"[12] (40) and has a couple of possible meanings, as it is unclear who is speaking. Critics have argued about the meaning of this ambiguous section of the lyric. I suggest that the seducer is speaking as if he were the maiden, playing her part in their rhetorical game. He is not referring to a physical beating; rather, he is imagining the maiden's realization that he has beaten her at the game, and she cannot escape his advances because of his social status. He has won the prize. The maiden, though, wants

11 It is better to take a person comely in clothes, / in arms to kiss and to embrace, / than a wretch wedded so badly.

12 That though he beat me, I might not escape him.

neither of these two options, and this is where her belief in magic becomes apparent. She opts for a third choice: to escape.

This maiden feels powerless on many levels. God had the power to shape her into a maiden; she is discontented with that. Her seducer has power over her simply because he is male, and society controls her because of the economic hierarchy that is in place. All of these forces have her feeling trapped. She longs to become something else, anything else, by shape-shifting in order to escape not only this situation but her maiden existence as well. On a first reading, her desire to shape-shift may link her to negative connotations because oftentimes shape-shifting is inaccurately associated with dark magic. Michael Bailey writes that shape-shifting is not an indication of demonic association but an ability that is learned. Shape-shifting is a cultural medieval certainty that elements of earth, air, fire, and water are the building blocks for everything that exists. The people of the Middle Ages believed that everything was composed of one or more of these elements, and that it was possible to make one thing into another by recombining them with the use of magic. This maiden is not looking for help from demons to escape her predicament; she simply wishes she had the knowledge to shape-shift, wishes that she was educated in that area of magical expertise.

The maiden reluctantly admits, though, that she cannot shape-shift: "Mid shupping ne mey it me ashunche;[13] / Nes I never wicche ne wile"[14] (45-46). Her desire to be a sorceress is similar to the situation in the previously analyzed "*Now springes the spray*" in which the female is not sure if she has magical powers in order to deal with the situation at hand. The woman in "In a Frith," however, knows without a doubt she does not have the ability to shape-shift, but her desire to have the power to use magic says much about her psychological state. And that is what these two lyrics have in common. Both of these lyrics illustrate a woman who is completely alone, with no one to rely on for help but her own self, so she relies on her belief in magic to guide her

13 I cannot escape by shape-shifting;
14 I am not a witch or sorceress.

in coping with the situation at hand.

The lyric "*I have forsworne it whil I live*" features a female narrator who is confident in her ability to successfully put a curse on someone, and she uses that confidence in a threatening manner. She consented to an affair out of financial need, and is now pregnant: "I go with childe, well I wot" (19). She proclaims that "I schrew the fader that it gate, / withouten he finde it milke"[15] (20-21). The word "withouten" translates to "unless" and is important because it implies that Sir John has not abandoned her yet, but she is assuming that he will. That assumption most assuredly stems from some past experience, either her own or one she has heard about from other women. She is well aware that a woman's sexuality is in many cases not her own. It becomes a fundamental aspect of masculine identity and honor for the male. Social hierarchy is again at the root of the abandonment. An affair that resulted in pregnancy had the potential to disrupt the family line of heirs, because it could result in illegitimate children who would create a rival claim to all land and property. Social hierarchy was embedded in the cultural outlook and needed no discussion between the two parties. Even during the affair, the woman in this lyric had to have known that a future with this man was out of the question. Affairs involving a man and a woman of different social classes did occur, but were kept secret by both for the sake of keeping a respectable reputation in the community.

She has the power to curse her lover, and this is obvious because she states in an active voice "I curse the father," but she will only do so if he does not provide for the baby. She is relying on her belief in magic as a tool for revenge. She is ready to curse him, and is merely waiting to see what Sir John, who is unaware of her plan, will do. One possible form of revenge that she may be scheming is to put a curse on him that will cause impotence. For example, Richard Kieckhefer explains in *Erotic Magic in Medieval Europe* that "if a knot is tied around the phallus of a wolf in the name of a man…(the wolf being presumably dead,

15 I curse the father that it engendered, / Unless he finds it milk.

and the phallus removed), that person will be incapable of copulation until the knot is untied" (43). A much easier curse, also known to be effective, was to boil forty ants in daffodil juice in the name of a man (43). What needs to be considered here is that it is not the process of creating the curse, tying a knot around a wolf's phallus or boiling the ants, for example, that makes the curse work; it is the psychological effect. If Sir John believes in magic, and his abandoned lover gets word to him that she is boiling forty ants in daffodil juice in his name to make him impotent, the thought alone could make him unable to perform. Again, what is important is how the belief in magic affects the psychological state. Even if there is no such thing as an operational curse, this woman has the power to control her ex-lover's love life because both the man and the woman believe that the curses work.

Desire for the power to use magic exposes a belief in the existence of magic, and the lyric "*A, dere God, what I am fayn*" depicts this certainty in a different way than the lyrics previously discussed. In this lyric, the woman relies on her belief in magic to explain her own behavior. The woman in this tale consented to an affair, and is now pregnant and alone. She consents out of sexual desire, made clear by her statement "Now will I not lete for no rage"[16] (17). She is pledging a vow to herself to never again consent to an affair out of desire. She does acknowledge her consent, but does not acknowledge her own responsibility in her willingness. She believes that the consent was out of her control, that an external force created in her the desire for sex. That external force, she believes, is magic used by the seducer: "I trow he coud of gramery; / I shall now telle a goodo skill why: / for what I hade siccurly, / To warne his will had I no mayn"[17] (7-10). This says a great deal about her psychological state; she genuinely believes she is a passive victim. She uses the existence of the power of magic as the reason for her mistake, mak-

16 Now will I not allow for sexual passion.

17 I believe he knew magic; / I shall now tell the reason why: / Because, from my own experience, / To refuse his will I had no strength.

ing an excuse, and yet a justifiable one. The maiden in this lyric was certainly aware that this happened, and so she lets herself believe that magic is how her lover was able to seduce her.

When the language in *"A, dere God, what I am fayn,"* is considered closely, specific words should be given important consideration. The woman's phrase "Of all his will I him lete" (12) translates to "I permitted him all of his will." The word "permitted" is a sign that she actually had control over the situation and could have refused his sexual advances, but instead she allowed him to have intercourse with her. This is an interesting contradiction to her other claim that she surrendered to his will because he had cast a spell on her. Either he was controlling her mind and her body with the use of a spell, or she had her faculties about her and was a willing participant. The language she uses suggests both possibilities, and thereby insinuates that she herself is unsure of what to believe.

The woman's use of the word "trowe" is interesting as well because it translates to "believe." It denotes that she believes he used magic to successfully seduce her, but she has no proof. In this sense, her belief in magic is indeed a sign of her psychological state. The possible use of magic is not the focus of this plot; rather, her belief in the possibility of magic as the cause is the focus in this lyric. This lyric is not about magic; it is about how her belief in magic affects her mental state.

In Middle English literature, women are often grouped into one of these three classifications: single virgin, married woman, and widow. What about the sexually active single woman? Did she exist? Certainly she did, and not just as a prostitute working in a brothel. These lyrics illustrate the sexually active single woman in a disheartening way because she is seduced and then abandoned. Each lyric in this article illustrates the single woman's belief in magic and how she relied on that belief to help explain the world in which she lived, to help find justice, and to help her make sense of her own behavior and the behavior of others, all amidst feelings of disorder and abandonment. A belief in magic gave her a sense of order and, more importantly, a sense of power.

These lyrics contain virtually every element that pertains to secretive romantic relationships: desire, euphoria, infatuation, jealousy, and fear: fear of others learning about the affair, fear of pregnancy, fear of the partner wanting commitment, and, above all, the woman's fear of abandonment. But the lyrics are more than just tales about romantic relationships; they provide information about the single medieval woman's belief in and use of magic. In this sense, the lyrics offer evidence regarding both when and how women employed magic, exemplifying that love is indeed an extraordinary madness.

It is important to remember that the Middle English lyrics were performed as songs, and that something is missing by reading them as poetry but not listening to them set to a melody. I suggest teaching these lyrics side-by-side with music that high school students listen to today, because introducing the students to these older texts through modern interpretation will make the lyrics more accessible. If the students bring in musical lyrics they are familiar with that address rejection, anger, passion, or revenge, and then compare the lyrics to the Middle English lyrics, they will find many similarities that span hundreds of years. A study of the Middle English lyrics allow students to reflect on their own life experiences, just as popular music does. To engage the students in identifying and interpreting the issues that are present in the Middle English lyrics, they could also be given an assignment to write and rap their own versions of the lyrics. After this project, the students will be able to demonstrate an understanding of how these lyrics reflect some of the attitudes and issues of the Middle Ages.

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---, eds. "I have forsworne it whil I live." 82-83.

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Appendix

First line of poem	Origional manuscript	Estimated date
A, dere God, what I am fayn	St. John's Camb. 259	Mid 15th c.
I have forsworne it whil I live	Camb. Univ. Ff. 5.48	15th c.
In a frith as I con fare fremede	B.M. Harley 2253	Early 14th c.
Now springs the spray	Lincoln's Inn, Hale 135	13th c.

Implementing Graphic Texts into the Language Arts Classroom

Doug Annett

Introduction

Historically, comic books have been reviled as worthless popular literature adolescents ingest like junk food. Through the years, however, the artistry involved in creating comic books has evolved to a point where long, complex narratives with mature themes have become commonplace, and the term "graphic novel" has been coined to identify this new, sophisticated class of graphic texts. Not just pulpy entertainment anymore, comic books and graphic novels have begun to garner such prestigious awards as the Hugo (*The Watchmen* by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons), the Printz (*American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang) , and even the Pulitzer Prize (*Maus* by Art Speigelman) .

There has never been a debate about whether or not comic books have been popular with young readers, but their value as instructional materials has been consistently questioned in the past. Surely with the increase of so-called literary quality in these texts, there must be some room for them within the traditional classroom. Given their popularity and appeal with adolescents, they should be able to engage student readers where tradi-

tional texts may not, and, with new studies on the importance of multiple literacies, the interplay of textual and visual narrative found within comic books and graphic novels could be quite useful in preparing students to navigate within our multimedia landscape.

But how should they be taught? How can teachers get the most out of this unique genre, and how must they prepare themselves to effectively deliver worthwhile lessons? These are the questions I explored through a qualitative process of interviewing teachers who have taught graphic texts in their classrooms in order to collect their experiences and feedback to help equip other teachers with the essential tools to make the most of their instruction.

While graphic novels and comic books share much in common with traditional literary texts, there are many unique aspects of the genre which Language Arts teachers may not be familiar with. Though these texts normally have a typical plot structure and storyline filled with similar characters, themes and metaphors, much of the action and symbolism occurs through use of graphic images rather than words, the English teacher's bread and butter. Though many English teachers may be well-versed in the language of images, there are surely many who are not.

Because so much of a graphic text's story is told through images, teachers introducing graphic novels and comic books into their classes will require some techniques and strategies to analyze this aspect of the storytelling or risk losing out on a large chunk of the text's unique meaning. Since comic books and graphic novels played a large role in fueling my personal love of reading as an adolescent and subsequent interest in becoming an English teacher, I wanted to take a closer at how graphic texts are being used in the classroom and to what effect.

Background

Graphic texts such as comic books and graphic novels have long been popular among adolescent readers, but in recent years the subject matter of these texts has become increasingly

sophisticated and mature. Beyond the traditional superhero tales most often associated with comic books and graphic novels, a growing market exists for realistic fiction, science fiction and fantasy, historical adventure, political satire, biography and memoir within the encompassing graphic novel genre (Bucher, 2004). The popularity of graphic novels has grown beyond the stereotyped subculture of overgrown fanboys and nerds to capture sales of over $150 million annually (Raiteri, 2003), while winning critical acclaim and inspiring movies to be made about them.

Many teachers have brought comic books and graphic novels into their classrooms in attempts to engage their students with a popular medium, many of them read outside of class. Others try to weave the understanding of visual images and symbols into their discussions on literary devices. With the potential for increased student engagement, and the current call by many researchers for more focus on arming students with the tools to successfully navigate a textual landscape increasingly dominated by information presented in a wide variety of mediums, often simultaneously (Eisner, 2004; Health, 2000; Kist, 2002; Lin, 2005; Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000; Schwartz, 2002; Walsh, 2006), it seems that graphic texts would be a standard inclusion into middle school and high school curricula. However, only isolated projects and experiences have been documented in the literature. If researchers agree that there should be more inclusion of visual texts within the communication and literary arts curriculum, how should they fit into the everyday classroom?

Before answering that question, I wanted to look deeper into the prevailing reasons why graphic texts are considered valuable in the English classroom, namely their ability to engage students, and their use in exploring issues of multimodal literacy, or the "reading" of different media or symbol systems simultaneously.

Engagement and Fluency

When teachers bring popular texts, such as comic books and graphic novels, into the classroom, they do so in hopes that

they can reach the students that are intimidated or frustrated by the big "L" literature they are often asked to read and analyze (Versaci, 2001). Though many of these so called "struggling" readers have become resistant to traditional texts, they often show a surprising level of engagement and fluency when reading popular texts such as comic books or magazines (Moje, et al., 2000). With graphic novels and comic books, students are still able to study "standard literary devices such as point of view, narrative, characterization, conflict, setting, tone, and theme" (Versaci, 2001), and at the very least are offered "diverse alternatives to traditional texts" (Schwartz, 2002). Versaci (2001) also found that, since students came into his freshman composition class with a strong understanding of comic books from years of casual experience with them, they were more comfortable in analyzing them and did so with greater depth than with traditional texts. Furthermore, once they developed a fluency in analyzing comic books, they were often better able to translate those ideas to the traditional texts they'd previously found more difficult. Other researchers have found that the graphic representations help second-language learners decode unfamiliar texts through visual cues (Crawford, 2004).

In her study of children's understanding of power and gender roles in a California elementary school, Anne Haas Dyson (1994) observed that even students as young as seven and eight years old could express their understanding of those complex themes within the traditional superhero stories found in comic books and cartoons. They were so engaged and familiar with the stories about their favorite superheroes that they were able to express a surprising depth about topics not normally addressed at such an age. Dyson explains that this is due to children understanding the social world of the texts as well as their own social worlds, and their ability to contrast them.

It's clear that engagement simply enhances fluency. Even when using graphic texts as an alternative to writing, as opposed to just reading, researchers have found a connection between the engagement of graphic texts and the fluency of their students. As part of the "Comic Book Project," Michael Bitz (2004) gath-

ered volunteer teachers and students in an after school program where students created their own comic books as a means of self-expression. Again, a surprising depth of themes surfaced:

> One surprising outcome of The Comic Book Project arose in the themes about which the children wrote. While professional comic books have traditionally been focused on superheroes, science fiction, and fantasized stories, many of the children's comic books were based on the hard reality of living in an inner-city environment. The children's work represents their lives as urban youth. They wrote about themes of drug abuse, gang violence, and harsh family situations, and in some cases the stories had very sad, yet very real, conclusions.

When Bitz administered surveys after the project to the students and the teachers, 92% of teachers and 92% of the students agreed that as a result of the Comic Book Project, the students enjoyed writing their own stories, while 86% of the students and 90% of the teachers felt that students became better at writing as a result.

Furthermore, Bitz observed a high amount of ownership displayed by the students, resulting in some of them not wanting to even turn their projects in out of fear they wouldn't get them back. This level of ownership propelled students to edit their own work heavily, revising not only storylines and characters, but grammar and mechanics as well.

This is an example of moving students from "perfunctory 'for-the-teacher writing' to committed writing", which should be a goal for every teacher (Gillespie, 2005). And if graphic texts can get students to commit that deeply to their writing, that alone makes them strong teaching tools in the English classroom.

Multimodality

More than just being an engaging form of literature for students to study as an alternative to traditional texts, graphic texts may require more "complex cognitive skills than reading text alone" (Lavin, 1998). They are very well-suited to teach the so-called "New Literacy" needed in a world of steadily increasing

visual representations, hypertextuality, and multimedia productions. Maureen Walsh (2006) has gone so far as to say, "the 'screen' and multimodal texts have developed new literacies. Written text is only one part of the message, and no longer the dominant part."

It will therefore be the job of teachers to prepare students to navigate more fluently through multimodal texts as well as traditional texts. Kist (2004) found that, after exposing students to an abstract, arts-rich, "new literacy" curriculum with the inclusion of a wider variety of symbol systems beyond traditional print text, teachers found that "students' abilities to be good consumers of information [had] risen" when compared to previous coursework with a heavier focus on verbal fluency.

In the words of Eliot Eisner (1994), "if we focus on one main symbol system--print--are we limiting human thought?" Scientists are beginning to understand "how important engaging with the visual arts can be for broadening neural circuitry involvement in the brain" (Heath, 2002). Visual textuality is not just a different symbol system; it's a different biological process. So in preparing our students to navigate the multimodal world, "we have to move away from the usual linear print-only expectations of 'reading'".

> Few textbooks or materials selected for use in school reflect these changes; few of us understand how to interpret the neuroscience findings noted above or the realities of electronic media in our own teaching of reading and writing. Only a few glimmers of help have yet appeared. These come in the form of radically different textbooks and innovative programs that stress learning in the arts.

Whether graphic novels or comic books are used as reading texts or as expressive texts, they fulfill this requirement of demanding two forms of literacy from the students, textual and visual, that intertwine together to form a unified meaning. This is no different from what we see everyday in websites and in advertising. As opposed to those two media, however, graphic novels lend themselves to longer and deeper examinations of themes, language and cultural constructs as a novel would, but with the added benefit of requiring a study of visual symbology

and expression.

Students labeled as "struggling readers" who have strong visual talents may even find that they enjoy reading and language arts classes more when they find something they are drawn to and are good at (Eisner, 2004; Kist, 2002). By simply adding another angle to the shape of 'reading' and textuality, many students may be able to find a new academic formula to decode a geometry they've had trouble calculating previously.

In the Classroom

Despite the strong research supporting graphic texts in the classroom, there may still exist a distrust or condescension towards the medium by teachers shaped by the traditional "canon" of accepted classics, even though graphic novels have become a very strong literary movement worldwide (O' English, Matthews, & Lindsay, 2006). The tide, though, does seem to be turning. Teachers and researchers such as Bitz, Dyson, Kist, Schwartz and Versaci have discussed and presented their findings and case studies to the education community at large, and are reporting positive results. But little exists right now to pull together their conclusions into a consistent pattern of best practices.

It is one thing for Bitz to run an after school program funded by Teacher's College and supported by professional comic book artists from Dark Horse Comics, Versaci to include comic books in a collegiate composition course, or Kist to observe college-prep, high school students in a team taught course specifically developed for the inclusion of the arts. It is quite another, however, for the average teacher to try out new material that requires a different lexicon and different preparation than the district-prescribed curriculum of a typical high school or middle school English class.

With this in mind, I investigated how various teachers in typical settings utilized graphic texts within their classrooms and the advice they would give to other teachers attempting to bring these texts into the classroom, focusing on the following three questions:

- What techniques are English teachers using to teach graphic texts?
- What type of training or preparation would be beneficial for other English teachers bringing graphic texts into the classroom?
- What is the value of teaching graphic texts in the English classroom?

Investigation

Setting

The participating teachers actively taught in a variety of middle schools, high schools and a university located in a large, midwestern metropolitan area. The urban center is noted as having large populations of Hispanic, African-American, Somali, Hmong, and Native American students. Minority groups represent roughly 25% of the 1.8 million residents in the two largest metropolitan counties.

"Amanda" taught 10th grade English classes in a suburb of the urban center where 20-25% of students are identified as minorities, with a high representation of students of African and Asian descent. The majority of students were considered to be of middle- or lower-middle class economic background. Two of Amanda's classes were considered advanced placement, and three regular placement.

"Beth" taught at a charter school in a small community in the second ring of suburbs, which housed grades kindergarten through 12th. The vast majority of students were from a white, middle-class, politically conservative background. Parents here were very active in school life and were part of the curriculum approval process. Seventy-five percent of students from this school went on to higher education after high school. Beth normally taught 11th and 12th grade English, but had not used graphic texts in those courses. Beth did, however, use graphic texts with 9th and 10th graders during a two day, theme -based symposium where students worked on their topics during full day courses.

"Christa" and "Denise" both taught 10th grade English at a high school in a wealthy suburb with 20% students of color. Ninety-five percent of the high school's graduates go on to higher education and the school was noted as being academically competitive with the vast majority of students taking advanced placement exams. Parents are noted as being highly engaged in their children's education at the school.

"Eric" taught English at a suburban, public arts high school of competitive enrollment open to 11th and 12th grade students from throughout the state with on-campus residences for out-state students. Sixteen percent of students were considered minorities and 8% qualified for free or reduced lunches.

"Frances" taught a course specifically about graphic novels at a small public university in the urban center. Students were upper-division, creative writing majors of a wide range of ages and socio-economic backgrounds. The majority of students at the university were enrolled part-time with thirty-six percent identifying themselves as students of color, and 70% being older than 25.

Participants

The participants in this study were all active middle, high school and university teachers who have used comic books or graphic novels as texts within their curricula. All teachers were Caucasian, of middle class economic background, and all taught specifically in Language Arts classrooms. Five of the six teachers interviewed were female and all represented a wide variety of ages and experience levels. I used snowball sampling technique to locate teachers who have taught using graphic texts in their classrooms. I also relied on concept sampling as well because teachers who have taught using graphic texts were the particular target group to be studied.

Data Collection

I gathered information from teachers using a semi-structured interview with eleven scripted questions (see Appendix B),

adding improvised questions to get more detail as necessary. My main focus was to use the interviews to find out what techniques teachers are using to teach graphic texts, what type of training or preparation they thought would be beneficial for other teachers bringing graphic texts into the classroom, and what value they believed graphic texts had within the context of Language Arts education. I then coded the transcripts and field notes for recurring themes related to "best practices" of teaching graphic texts and advice the teachers have for others attempting to use graphic texts within their curriculum

Discoveries

The Teachers

Of relevance to the amount of information gathered in this study, teachers who have formally taught graphic texts were extremely hard to come by. I spoke with many teachers who were interested in using graphic texts in their classrooms, but few had ever actually taught them. Many teachers stated that graphic texts simply weren't part of their curriculum, and, due to limitations in their ability to bring in topics outside of their schools' planned curricula, they weren't able to teach them in their classrooms.

Of the teachers included in this study, three of the six actually taught graphic novels that were a planned piece of their school's Language Arts curriculum, while two others used graphic texts as part of units where teachers were given their own choice of materials. One of the six was able to create an elective graphic novel course for upper level students in a university creative writing program.

These six teachers fell into two basic camps relating to their experience with graphic texts and their personal interest in them. Amanda, Eric and Frances considered themselves to be heavy readers of graphic novels and spoke often of reading comic books and comic strips as children, with Amanda and Frances relating a family involvement in graphic texts. Frances told me her mother had tried to encourage her to read as a child by

giving her a subscription to *Mad* magazine, while Amanda said her father often liked to read the Sunday comics out loud to her family giving each character a different voice. All three of these teachers showed a familiarity with contemporary graphic novels and actively sought out titles that are considered to be of high literary quality by critics and other readers. Eric and Frances were particularly well-read in the study of comics and graphic novels. They both spoke casually of the theories and methods behind graphic storytelling put forth by authors Will Eisner and Scott McCloud, considered to be two of the leading thinkers on graphic texts or, works they term "sequential art". These three teachers all felt a strong desire to share their love of graphic novels and comics with their students.

The other three teachers reported almost no interaction with comic books or graphic novels prior to teaching them in their classes and had very little interest in reading them. All three, however, shared a strong professional interest in graphic texts as a teaching tool. Beth, who had brought graphic texts into her class on her own, stated she had "heard other teachers talking about them, and I wanted to find out more." She had also been introduced to graphic novels through a graduate course in media studies and had heard they were very popular. Christa stated she had "zero interest" and "did not understand the graphic novel phenomenon" but felt using graphic texts was a way "to be current in our field, which is important to me," while Denise described her interest as "a new way to help kids connect to text." Christa and Denise also mentioned a "visual literacy" requirement at their grade level that they felt they weren't very good at teaching and hoped graphic novels would help them address that deficiency.

Teacher Resources

The six teachers were all very consistent in which resources they used in their lesson plans. For example, whether or not a teacher had a classroom set of graphic novels to work with, five of the six teachers brought in or had students themselves bring in graphic novels or comic books they could choose from

to read and study as part of their general overview of the genre, and while introducing the vocabulary and concepts.

To establish this basic framework of the genre, four teachers cited the two-page *Graphic novel /comics terms and concepts* study sheet offered at the *Read, Write, Think* website run by the International Reading Association / National Council of Teachers of English, which gives an extremely basic overview of the genre without accompanying examples of the terms or concepts as they actually appear in graphic texts. One of these four also attended a conference workshop hosted by the National Council of Teachers of English and utilized the notes and information she received there to add the information presented at the *Read, Write, Think* website. She stated:

> I went to the NCTE conference specifically looking for some help on working with graphic novels… not that they gave me what I ended up doing, but they gave some terminology and some ideas and then I went ahead and created my own way of using it in class.

Eric and Frances noted using the book *Understanding Comics* by Scott McCloud as the primary resource for establishing the basic overview of graphic texts. A 215-page text on the art of graphic novels and comics, it explains the history and analyzes the genre in great detail and actually does so using graphic text. It is, in essence, a graphic novel about graphic novels.

In addition to these fundamental resources, Christa, Denise and Frances also reported gathering news articles about the popularity of graphic novels, interviews with artists, and book reviews of graphic novels. These sources came from a wide variety of media such as popular new magazines and newspapers, academic journal articles, radio interviews and documentaries and films about the artists themselves such as *Crumb*, *The Realms of the Unreal*, and *American Splendor*.

Amanda also reported gathering significant amounts of information from peers. She was able to collect background information and graphic novel recommendations from the librar-

ian at her school, exercise ideas from a creative writing teacher who presented graphic texts in her class and some basic information on graphic design from an art teacher.

Another common resource cited by three of the teachers was the students themselves. In addition to speaking with students about the comics, graphic novels and manga they were bringing into the classrooms for their own free reading, the students contributed greatly to overall lessons through active observation and discussion. As one teacher put it:

> None of us [teachers] are really expert in [graphic texts]. All that we know is just the stuff that we read ourselves. We tried to talk about elements of design, pleasing images, using variety, novelty, contrast… and we chose a couple of pages to discuss and the kids actually came up with way more interesting things to talk about than I had thought of, such as why the panels were designed the way they were and so they were way more savvy than I was… they just seem naturally more in tune with it.

Analysis of the Texts

The teachers reported a variety of different approaches to ways their classes analyzed graphic texts. All six teachers reported at least some traditional literary analysis of the texts focusing on topics such as character, setting, themes, symbolism, metaphor, plot analysis, etc.. None, however, used traditional literary analysis alone. Most of the teachers ended up mixing elements of other media studies with genre specific elements of graphic texts.

All six teachers began their units with review of concepts and vocabulary, such as "panel," "frame," "gutter" and "bleed," unique to the genre, and had students identify these in the graphic texts they were studying using a variety of worksheets and examples. Four of the six reported using information given on graphic novels from the *Read, Write, Think* website as a basis for this overview, while the other two referenced the Scott McCloud book, *Understanding Comics*. However, with the exception of the university teacher of the graphic novels course who spent

considerable time with her class studying the concepts surrounding the passage of time in sequential art and the six frame-to-frame transitions described by McCloud (moment-to-moment, action-to-action, subject-to-subject, scene-to-scene, aspect-to-aspect and non sequiter), all other teachers moved quickly into analyzing concepts not specific to the genre.

Amanda and Beth reported using or planning to use techniques common in film studies courses such as types of camera shots and angles and relating them to the frames found in graphic novels and comic books. Amanda had students "analyze a close up and its effect, and they had to analyze a long shot, or medium shot or other camera angle that they thought was pretty effective and describe why that was." Beth was preparing a lesson plan to use next year that will have students take a short story and turn the literary text into graphic text, then use that as a way to introduce film terms and concepts for a film study unit.

Four teachers reported integrating the study of graphic art and design into their analyses of the texts. Eric, who taught at an arts school, stated "many of the students at our school have a strong visual arts background, so they are able to discuss the visual aspects of the graphic novel without a lot of front-loading." However, even though these students came in with a significant understanding of graphic design, this teacher specifically reviewed with students aspects of visual symbolism as part of the analysis. Christa and Denise, both expressing little or no background in visual arts, discussed artistic and design choices with their students. The students came up with their own ideas as to why certain styles or images were incorporated by an artist, and in particular why the graphic novel they had been studying was drawn in a rather simplistic style, solely in black and white even though the subject matter was very grim and complex. Amanda actually shared some information given to her by an art teacher on the use of color in one particular graphic novel and had her students study "the use of font and its effect: the font style, the font size, and where does it change and why" within the lettering of the dialogue and narrative panels of the texts.

Beyond analyzing the actual texts, Christa, Denise and

Frances felt a need to legitimize or defend the graphic novels and comic books they brought into their classes by analyzing the art-form as a whole through the use of journalistic sources. For example, Christa and Denise, who worked closely together with the same grade-level students at the same school, thought their college-bound students would consider graphic novels to be somehow less intellectually significant and brought in articles, reviews and interviews from the popular news media to justify the popularity and critical acclaim of graphic novels. Frances, who taught a graphic novel course at the university level, also brought in radio interviews of graphic novel artists she had recorded, and brought in a movie about graphic novel and comic book artists to help students understand the artistic complexity of the genre and build an appreciation for the voices of the authors.

Student Exercises

All of the teachers interviewed placed a high value on the creation of the graphic texts by the students themselves and included that creative element in their units. These creative exercises ranged from the quite simple to a much more elaborate telling of a historical narrative. Some teachers utilized smaller exercises at the beginning of their lessons, building up to the larger, more complex projects as students learned more about the genre.

As an introduction to the creation and dynamics of graphic texts, Amanda had her students write a narrative paragraph describing what was happening in a single frame of a graphic novel. The process was then reversed when she had students take a passage they particularly liked of 6-10 paragraphs from a novel her classes had recently read, and create a graphic representation of that scene. A build-up activity Frances used was what she called the “three panel story”, where she gave her students three panels to create “a beginning, a middle and an end to a story” as a way of emphasizing the sequential nature of the medium. Both of these teachers allowed students to draw the representation themselves, or use computer graphics, power

point presentations, collages, stick figures or even work in teams to compensate for the different levels of artistic abilities of the students, a choice repeated by all of the teachers assigning the creation of graphic texts.

Of the longer graphic texts teachers assigned their students to create, Beth and Frances allowed significant choice of topic, Eric and Amanda assigned students to create a first-person narrative and the final two, Christa and Denise, assigned a longer, research-based task focusing on the theme of persecution. While reading Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis: Story of a Childhood*, Christa and Denise's students were also studying the use of primary sources for historical research in their social studies class, which also focused on the theme of persecution. Students were then asked to find a primary source to interview about that person's own experience of some sort of persecution in the world and tell that graphically on a single, 11" x 14" piece of paper.

Student Response

Overwhelmingly, teachers reported that students thought the graphic units were fun and a welcome change of pace. As one teacher put it, "I think kids really enjoyed the whole thing, and I think it was new and different for them, and it was valued in the classroom… that this is real text, a real thing to study just as much as 'stupid Odyssey' or something. I think kids really did enjoy it." Though teachers all reported that students particularly enjoyed the creative exercises and the social aspect of that process, even the reading of the materials alone produced high levels of engagement.

Only Amanda and Beth reported that their students would regularly bring comic books and manga into class as items they read in their personal time, and had a large interest in the genre coming into the units. However, even the teachers who hadn't seen much outside reading of graphic novels and comic books among their students reported a high level of engagement with the texts studied in class, as well as students starting to read them on their own. Four of the teachers, all of whom assigned students to read at least one graphic novel of their own choice,

reported that students actively shared and read the graphic novels they had chosen outside of class even though there was no credit or assignment to do so. All teachers reported that many students read ahead of the class assignments, brought creative work home when they weren't required to do so and shared what they were doing with other students.

When asked about which students in particular seemed to engage the most with this genre, the answers were all over the board. Christa and Denise cited boys in general as being particularly engaged, especially those who had been previously disengaged from reading, while Amanda stated that higher academic achievers were more engaged. Frances reported that those students who came in with an interest in traditional superhero comics were particularly engaged, while Beth gave an example of three female students who "considered themselves to be quirky" and read graphic novels and manga most heavily outside of class. Beth also noted a child with Asperger's Syndrome as being noticeably more engaged in the graphic novel unit than in other previous units.

Teachers commonly related that students with a talent for visual arts tended to have a particular interest in the genre. Beth, Christa and Denise noted that certain students who had an affinity for drawing were able to academically shine during the creative projects when those same students had not achieved the same success previously in the class.

Amanda, Beth and Frances reported that students who felt they weren't artistically talented showed the highest level of resistance, but they all explained that the students became less apprehensive when they were told they could have someone else help with drawing or they could use stick figures or magazine cut outs.

The other typically resistant student could be labeled as the high achieving academic who thinks graphic novels and comic books are unworthy of serious study. Christa, Denise and Frances witnessed this in their classes, and, interestingly, these were the three teachers who brought in artist interviews, journalistic stories about the genre, and book reviews to help legitimize

the genre. Also of significance may be the fact that these were three teachers who taught the most advanced students.

Value

After teaching their units on graphic texts, all teachers agreed that there was at least some value to the use of graphic texts in the English classroom. Some teachers were certainly more passionate about the genre than others, but even a teacher who considered herself to be a traditional, back-to-the-basics English teacher saw graphic texts as useful for "certain students", saying, "part of me says let's just stick to reading and writing and call it good, but another part of me says there are just some students who don't get it that way, and they need another way to see it, or read it, or act it out or whatever." Amanda, Christa, Denise and Frances even specifically said they thought graphic texts should be part of any basic English course.

The most common value teachers saw was in the engagement level of students. All of the teachers except Beth felt their students were significantly more engaged in reading the graphic novels and comic books than when reading traditional texts, with Christa, Denise and Eric reporting that they felt the lower-level readers were particularly more engaged with the graphic texts than traditional texts. As Eric put it, "Graphic novels seem to pull these kids in, and the pictures give them contextual clues that low level readers can use to engage more thoroughly with the text."

The same three teachers also mentioned that they thought students identified with the contemporary nature of the graphic novels they read as opposed to reading the classics produced several decades or even centuries ago. Christa and Denise added that, since the students often knew more than the teachers about the topic, "it was much more authentic" because students participated more actively in their own inquiry of the topic rather than being fully guided by the teacher.

And, finally, two teachers brought up the practicality of bringing graphic novels into the classroom for their quickness and usefulness. As one of them said:

> Because it doesn't take up as much time in class, you can do a unit on a graphic novel in a week or ten days, whereas a print text we spend two weeks or three or four. So I think they're very valuable. And you can hit all of your English standards; you can talk about all the literary analysis aspects, so I think it's great.

Advice / Suggestions

When asked about what they felt would help other teachers become more effective in teaching graphic novels units, all interviewees called for more teacher training. Teachers saw themselves weakest in the vocabulary of the graphic texts and the history of the genre. It was common to hear the teachers speak of peers intimidated by graphic texts. Amanda and Frances mentioned that they were often asked about their graphic novel units by other teachers, but few they had spoken with were comfortable enough to incorporate graphic novels into their own classes. Beth expressed her own discomfort:

> I feel like to teach it, I want to be an expert about what I'm teaching … and [knowing about] the different trends that have appeared in comic books over the years would be helpful and I think you need to know a little bit about art in order to think in visual terms.

Though Beth said she didn't think it necessary for all English teachers to be required to take a course on graphic novels, she thought it would be a good elective course at the graduate level.

Frances felt that English teachers simply need to read more graphic novels to become more familiar with them and feel comfortable in teaching them. "I don't think teachers are necessarily resistant," she said, "but it's out of their comfort zone," and reading more graphic novels could be enough to give the comfort they need.

On the other hand, though, Christa, who felt the students were already familiar with the genre and naturally inclined to-

ward it, said this:

> We barely have the background or don't have the vocabulary that would be needed or the knowledge… to teach an elective course on graphic novels, but I don't think it's a bad thing to not be an expert for two or three weeks out of the year. It's a natural and fun place to take a back seat to the students, and they sort of revel in that.

Though she did go on to say she is very interested in visual literacy and thinks learning more about graphic texts would be helpful, the crux of her argument was that teachers didn't have to be experts in everything they brought into their classes.

Conclusion

In speaking with teachers about their experiences teaching graphic texts in the English classroom, I found they observed the same value in using those materials that the research literature supports. All teachers felt their students were very engaged with the materials, often more so than with traditional texts, and they were familiar with the genre and able to speak about it with a surprising depth, often with more depth than the teachers themselves. Most teachers felt their lower-level readers found more success with a highly visual text, and many were able to academically shine during these units in a way they normally didn't in their Language Arts classes, another phenomenon supported by the published research.

Though maybe not as profound as finding a relationship between the graphic genre and increased academic success, all of the teachers found great additional value in graphic texts through their basic practicality. Some were able to bridge the genre with other media studies such as film study, or use them to fulfill visual literacy requirements set forth by their school districts. If nothing else, all teachers were at minimum able to get the same types of instruction out of graphic texts as they were from traditional texts, whether it be studying elements of literature, researching historical periods, or studying topics in

conjunction with courses such as social studies or art classes. And they were able to work through these texts quickly and efficiently, an aspect not to be taken lightly when teachers must meet many requirements in a short period of time.

Additionally, the graphic novel units got students reading outside of class. Teachers frequently saw students passing books back and forth to each other to be read for their own personal enjoyment. How often is that witnessed? The fact that so many students shared and discussed graphic novels outside of class after being introduced to them in class cannot be overlooked. These students made reading and talking about graphic novels a shared, social activity within the context of their personal lives, not simply a chore they were pushed into by teachers as part of academic requirements. If teachers aspire to bring authentic study and materials into the classroom, a genre that students willingly and voluminously read for their own pure enjoyment must be included.

Interestingly, though, teachers often observed students' reluctance at the beginning of their lessons to take these materials seriously and felt a strong need to legitimize the genre as worthy of study. Though students may simply think that what they study in school is fundamentally different from what they enjoy outside of class, the teachers who took the time to study the genre as an art form, its popularity, its techniques, its artists and its critical analysis felt it was a valuable technique in opening up their students to study of the genre and understanding its possibilities.

Having students create their own graphic texts also added interest and classroom accomplishment. Every single teacher devoted class time to these creative projects and all noted an extremely high level of engagement and success among their students. Since students immersed themselves so completely in these projects as fun, almost diversionary tasks, learning became natural, intrinsic and socially valued.

However, the most significant thing I "found" during this study may have been what I didn't find: more teachers teaching graphic novels. Despite the existing research, despite the over-

whelmingly positive experiences these six teachers had with the genre, very few of the teachers approached had ever brought a graphic text into their classrooms, and those that did often did so on their own. Some noted an inability to do so because their district assigned all readings and had not assigned a graphic text, but many reported that they simply didn't know much about the genre. Of the six teachers interviewed, five spoke of colleagues that they interacted with who had expressed an interest in the use of graphic texts as teaching materials, or praised the participating teachers for their use of graphic texts, but avoided teaching those texts themselves due to their own discomfort. Even those teachers interviewed who had gone out on a limb to teach these texts felt a need to dig further and learn more about the genre to overcome feelings of not being prepared for it. Though multiple teachers explained the students were more than capable of studying this genre even without much expertise offered by the teacher, there was still a distinct uneasiness they felt toward the genre.

Implications for future research

Since I found so few teachers who had taught graphic texts in the classroom, I think it would be valuable to research why these texts are not being brought there. Since it was reported that teachers either had no choice as to whether or not they could bring graphic texts into their classes or felt uneasy about teaching the genre, it may be helpful to study why school districts are not including graphic texts into the curriculum despite the documented popularity and usefulness, or what effects a course in graphic texts might have on teacher behavior and practices.

From the perspective of students' use of graphic texts, it would be interesting to investigate the reading of comic books and graphic novels as a shared, social activity among students and the impact that has on the students as readers and their success in the classroom. There may also be other social or cultural benefits outside of their academic lives that are derived from this social reading practice as well.

Another area of possible research may be to study in more

depth whether or not the creation of graphic texts by students has any correlation to academic success. The students clearly enjoyed the creative projects, but do those projects bring any added benefits to Language Arts instruction outside of increased engagement? Though my focus was on a qualitative study to find out what teachers were doing with graphic texts, the next logical step would be to study those techniques from a quantitative standpoint to measure the effects of those techniques.

And finally, with all of the benefits of bringing graphic texts into the classroom combined with the lack of confidence expressed by the teachers regarding this genre, I think studying the effects of more teacher training would be helpful to get the most out of these powerful materials. Though many teacher training programs now expose graduate students to graphic novels, particularly in adolescent literature courses, many of the teachers I spoke with still expressed a discomfort with the genre, suggesting that they could benefit from more academic study of the genre. It may be helpful to offer current teachers single-day seminars or trainings brought into conferences and meetings to review these materials and share resources. School districts should also look more closely into assigning graphic texts as part of their set curricula. Regardless of how it is done, though, teachers and their students can only benefit from the study of graphic texts in the classroom, and it's a shame more are not taking advantage.

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Appendix A

Graphic Novels, Comic Books and Resources Recommended for Classroom Use

A Contract with God, and Other Tenement Stories by Will Eisner. Features four stories set in a New York tenement during the 1930s exploring the complex issues of life. Often mistakenly called the first graphic novel, this is considered a major landmark of the genre.

American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang. A Printz Award winner and National Book Award in the Young Peoples Literature category, this book combines three converging plot lines about a second generation immigrant whose parents are from Taiwan, the Monkey king of Chinese folklore and a white boy, whose Chinese cousin embodies every negative Chinese stereotype imaginable.

American Splendor by Harvey Pekar. An autobiographic comic book series depicting Pekar's own everyday life. Later turned into an award-winning movie in 2003.

Aya by Marguerite Abouet and Clement Oubrerie. This graphic novel depicts the lives of teenage girls growing up in the Ivory Coast during the late-1970s before the country descended into civil unrest.

Blankets by Craig Thompson. An autobiographical graphic novel following the author's life from childhood to early adulthood in an Evangelical Christian family. *Blankets* was named by *Time* magazine as one of the Top Ten Graphic Novels of All Time.

Buddha by Osamu Tezuka. Known as the "Walt Disney of Manga" for his widespread influence in Japan, Tezuka's graphic biography of Buddha includes a large cast of original

characters whose exploits underscore Buddhist concepts.

City of Glass, The Graphic Novel by Paul Karasik and David Mazzucchelli. A graphic adaptation of Paul Auster's 1985 existential mystery novel named by *The Comics Journal* as one of the 100 Best Comics of the Century.

Epileptic by David B. This visually adventurous graphic memoir illustrates the life of the author growing up with an epileptic brother in the Loire Valley of France surrounded by a solitary world of fantasy and fear.

Exit Wounds by Rutu Modan. A graphic novel about terrorism in Israel wherein a cab driver learns his father was killed by a suicide bomber and searches for clues as to what really happened to him.

Ghostworld by Daniel Clowes. This graphic novel tells the story of two cynical teenage girls whose friendship slowly drifts apart. A film adaptation, slightly different from the graphic novel, was made in 2001.

Jimmy Corrigan, the Smartest Kid on Earth by Chris Ware explores the theme of alienation in families as experienced by the main character and his grandfather. This graphic novel has won multiple book awards in the U.S. and Britain.

Love and Rockets by Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez. This comic book series features multiple long-running storylines interspersed with short stories and one-offs. Its two main storylines, referred to as *Palomar* and *Hoppers 13*, are set in a fictional Latin-American city and a fictional city in California following the lives and relationships of a large cast of realistic, complex characters.

Maus I: A Survivor's Tale: My Father Bleeds History & ***Maus II: A Survivor's Tale: And Here My Troubles Begin.*** The Art Speigelman's Pulitzer Prize winning memoir documents his father's experience of the holocaust and his own struggle to con-

nect with the man he never fully understood.

Palestine by Joe Sacco. This piece of graphic journalism gives an account of life in Palestine and a history of the Intifada and Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

Persepolis: Story of a Childhood & ***Persepolis 2: Story of a Return*** by Marjane Satrapi. Part One of this graphic memoir tells the story of Satrapi's childhood in Iran during the cultural and political upheaval of the Iran-Iraq War, while Part Two follows the author's high school years in Europe and her subsequent return to Iran.

The Sandman by Neil Gaiman. A critically-acclaimed, cult favorite comic book series, *The Sandman* follows a family of seven anthropomorphic abstract concepts: Destiny, Death, Dream, Destruction, Desire, Despair and Delirium, often featuring characters from history, mythology and religion.

Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art by Scott McCloud. This graphic novel about graphic novels gives a history and analysis of "sequential art", setting out an academic vocabulary specific to the genre and details the complex ways words and images interact. Most appropriate for high school students.

The Watchmen by Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons. A grim deconstruction of superheroes and the moral codes associated with them, this Hugo Award winner explores the themes of authority and social power.

Graphic Novel/Comics Terms and Concepts at the Read, Write, Think website. www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson1102/terms.pdf - Helpful background vocabulary for any unit on graphic texts.

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

1. Describe your personal experience with graphic novels and / or comic books.
2. Describe your experience with graphic texts in the classroom.
3. If used in the classroom, describe the methods you used to teach them.
4. How do those methods differ from those used with traditional texts?
5. What topics have you covered during your lessons with graphic texts?
6. Describe your observations of students' involvement with graphic novels and comic books.
7. Have you had any feedback from parents about their opinions on graphic texts in the classroom?
8. Have you had any feedback from other teachers about their opinions on graphic texts in the classroom?
9. Is there a typical student who tends to engage more with graphic texts?
10. What is your opinion the value of graphic texts within the English curriculum?
11. Is there a need for any special preparation needed by teachers in order to teach graphic texts effectively?

Multigenre Writing: An Answer to Many Questions

Sherri Larson

As the last month of the semester with tenth grade English students neared, I asked myself two critical questions: How will I complete all of the writing requirements in our curriculum? What can I do to energize the students for this final push to the end? Tom Romano's (2000) *Blending Genre, Altering Style* gave me an effective, flexible answer: multigenre writing. Multigenre writing means writing about a single topic in a variety of genres, styles, voices, and perspectives. the multigenre writing approach allows students to immerse themselves in a topic of choice, learn research skills, and explore the creative possibilities of various writing genres.

Romano recalls being inspired to use multigenre writing in the classroom by the short book *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, by Michael Ondaatje (1970). Ondaatje's book is not a chronological or sequential biography. Rather, it is an eclectic exploration of possibilities in a variety of genres. It jumps from topic to topic, from poem to list, from news articles to captions of photos that aren't even there. Ondaatje himself said in a recent interview, "When I was writing *Billy the Kid*, all I had was the question, How do I write this book? That's always the question" (Welch, 2000). More recently, Ondaatje spoke about his book *Anil's Ghost*, and how he lets the writing itself guide his decisions: "The structure happens as the story unravels, with

each discovery, at each plateau, a sidebar or descant, whatever it is….it's that kind of odd mix of running with the wave, then later on having the ability to go back and jog it around a bit to make it sharper" (Welch, 2000).

High school students are often required to construct traditional "research" papers, to prepare for higher level courses and college. The current Minnesota Language Arts standards group the required types of writing together in this way: "Plan, organize and compose narrative, expository, descriptive, persuasive, critical and research writing to address a specific audience and purpose" (Minnesota Department of Education). Why not accomplish those goals in a single, sustained project? Such an approach would allow and require depth and reflection upon a single topic. Ondaatje's book demonstrates that historically accurate research can be paired creatively with speculation, theory, poetry, visual art, and drama by using multiple genres. Romano (2000) describes how he envisions the application of multigenre writing in the classroom:

> A multigenre paper arises from research, experience, and imagination. … [It] is composed of many genres and subgenres, each piece self-contained, making a point of its own, yet connected by theme or topic and sometimes by language, images, and content. In addition to many genres, a multigenre paper may also contain many voices, not just the author's. The trick is to make such a paper hang together. (Romano x-xi)

Multigenre writing is a good fit for today's active students, as it both capitalizes on student need for variety and recognizes new literacies. It also speaks to my own writing process. When I write, I am like a chef with something near boiling on every burner. The phone is ringing, someone's at the door, and the potholders are out of reach. Despite the seeming chaos, there is valuable energy, spontaneity, and creativity in the process.

As I researched and considered possibilities for multigenre projects in my own classroom, I still wondered, How does it *work*? How do I really *do* this thing with students? Then one day, this sentence fell out of my mouth while I stood in front of

my tenth grade students: "If you were to pick one topic—any topic you want—to study, research, and write about until the end of the term, what would it be?" And so it began.

To share with sincerity and enthusiasm about the results of my first journey into multigenre writing, I ask myself Ondaatje's question: "How do I write this?" I have research and stories and quotes and articles, each referencing more books and articles. I could make notecards. I could string research into paragraphs to make a unified whole, doing the repetitious work of agreeing or disagreeing with already published work. Even Romano admitted that it's difficult to explain what multigenre writing is: "Definitions are helpful, but my students don't develop a clear idea of a multigenre paper until they read one" (xi). With this encouragement, there is no more fitting way to write about multigenre writing than by writing a multigenre article.

First, I offer a disclaimer/ explanation: The following examples are "true fiction"; they represent the moods, ideas, and comments students offered during an actual five week unit, but they are not direct quotes or genuine copies. The topics mentioned are actual student choices, and the genre mentioned and demonstrated here represents actual choices in our unit. There really was a student with the topic of gymnastics, and she created an excellent project. However, the voice I created for the student journal entries represents the collective questions and reactions students might have experienced.

Forward: A Guide to Reading a Multigenre Paper

Both the headings and the footnotes are important parts of the reading. The headings provide some explanation of the genres and what each represents.

The footnotes make the reading process unique. Melinda Putz (2006), in *A Teacher's Guide to the Multigenre Research Paper*, actually suggests using endnotes for explanation and references, so that the text is not interrupted. I have used footnotes here for ease of reading. The notes offer both research and explanation. (When read electronically, the footnotes can be seen by the reader by scrolling across the number, which eases

the reading process significantly). Dear Reader, use whatever technique captures and sustains your interest.

A Multigenre Journey

Journal Entries by a Student in Tenth Grade English—The First Days

November 20, 2007

The teacher says we need to pick a topic, and we need to love it until January. Eventually, we need to write something persuasive about it. That's it. I don't know what to pick.[1]

November 26, 2007

English is weird. We went around the room today and told our topics. No matter what they were, she wrote them down, without questions. Most teachers give specific writing prompts and we have to stick to them. I'm not sure about this. I picked gymnastics because it's my life, and I don't mind studying something I already know. There were a lot of sports: two kids picked basketball, one hockey, one wakeboarding, three baseball and one badminton. Someone picked the Minnesota State Fair. Another picked ice cream. Our teacher said yes to them all. Someone even picked PopTarts. It's kind of funny, but what is there to know? They're good. That's all I need to know.

Student Assignment Week One: Introduction of the Topic

What's your topic? Let your topic tell us! Using and citing at least 3 resources, give this essential background information in first person (using "I") in one of these ways:

1) a narrative explanation of your topic's history and key points, written from your topic's point of view. Let

1 Choice is an important element of multigenre writing. In *A Teacher's Guide to the Multigenre Research Project*, Melinda Putz (2006) tells teachers: "Before you begin, it is important to decide exactly what kind of experience you want for your students. Do you want them to learn certain research skills? Are there specific types of writing you think they should master? How much freedom of choice do you want them to have? How much responsibility can they handle?" (Putz 16). With these questions in mind, a teacher can mold the project to meet curricular needs.

your topic explain itself;
2) a "campaign speech" in which your topic will explain why it's a great topic; an "acceptance speech" in which your topic will give thanks for the honor of being your topic.[2]
3) have another idea of how to share this information? Ask.

A Teacher's Multigenre Lesson Plan

Objective: to write the introductory background piece of student topics in first person using research

Students will be able to:

- use basic internet and library research to study history
- practice writing in first person
- practice the "voice" trait through use of first person
- correctly use MLA in text citation (parenthetical)
- correctly format a works cited page and using MLA format

Student Journal Entry

November 29, 2007

I knew there was a catch. We have to make a works cited page. I hate that. At least we only need to make one for the whole project. And we're also doing this footnote/ endnote thing I've never seen, but it's easy.[3]

A Teacher's Memories of Traditional Research Writing

2 Tom Romano (2000) suggests that every project must have a solid introductory piece. This core of information helps students decide how to continue, and it sets the tone for the multigenre project. This assignment is original, interesting, and not "plagiarize-able." Assigning it in first person forces the students to interact with the material, combining it to construct new truth. And it's fun.

3 Both Melinda Putz (38-39) and Romano (2000) stress the importance of the proper research format and citation. Teaching the rules of "intellectual property" are critical elements of the multigenre project. It also adds formality and professionalism. Putz suggests using endnote citations so parenthetical references don't distract.

My first research paper. I had no idea what I was doing. I'd watched my older siblings do this. I knew I had to go to the library and fill up notecards with quotes and information. Then I'd organize the notecards and connect them all together with my own words. When all of the notecards went from the "not used yet" pile to the "used," I was done. The finished product was a multiparagraph five-page essay. Additional drafts or "revisions" meant literally starting over, winding a new blank onionskin piece of paper into the typewriter and producing a brand new paper. Thus, when it was typed, it was done. There was no adjusting or deleting, adding or sharpening.[4]

What to Do in Multigenre? One Teacher's Brainstorm List

narratives, first, third, and even second person
poetry—all sorts
newspaper articles
pictures (photos, collages, drawings, whatever)
memories/ reflections
perspectives of related people/ events
timelines
recipes
graphs
fiction
games/ activities
point/ counterpoint or editorials, etc.
comics or cartoons
obituaries
labyrinthine sentences
box scores, charts
scripts

4 Romano (2000) devotes an entire chapter to, "What of Traditional Research Papers?" It's an important question. Romano even cites fellow researcher Melinda Putz's criticism: "Students do not learn to carry on a sustained written discussion of a topic" (Romano 87). Romano recognizes that traditional expository writing is both required and respected, but in a recent anthology entitled *Teaching the Neglected "R,"* he writes, "…expository writing is not the only genre in town… Writing is a big world mural, not a snapshot" (Newkirk & Kent 88).

web pages, wikis
radio/ tv shows
models/ "containers" for projects
music/ soundtracks[5]

Email from Parent of Tenth Grader

Date:	Fri, 7 Dec 2007 08:59:33 -0600
From:	"parent of student" parentofstudent@parentmail.com
To:	"Sherri Larson"
Subject:	assignment

Ms. Larson
My son tells us that he is going to be writing about the 1927 Yankees the rest of the quarter. We don't think he's telling the truth. He's always been obsessed with the team and spends a lot of time looking up facts about them. Now it's even worse, and he claims it's an assignment. We don't really understand how this could be his English assignment for a whole month. Are the other teachers doing this?
Parent[6]

5 Almost anything can be included in the multigenre project. Both Romano (2000) and Putz (2006) insist on the importance of determining *purpose* for each choice of genre. Genre instruction must include both what the genre is, as well as appropriate uses for that genre. Readers and writers learn that form communicates as much as (and perhaps more than) content. This expands students' definitions of writing. Romano writes, "Writing is book reviews, email messages, poems, journal entries, news stories, love notes, editorials, technical instructions, so many genres and subgenres that assembling a comprehensive list of them is impossible" (Newkirk & Kent 88-89).

6 The parent concern that their son is not gaining important writing skills using just one topic (and perhaps because he's having too much fun) is a common misperception. Teacher Julia Gillespie (2005) used multigenre techniques for literature study in her secondary classroom. Her testimony might be a good answer to an email like this: "Students willingly experimented with various genres. Some borrowed ideas from classmates, while others tried something original. They willingly reread parts of the book for clarification. They dig deeply and made connections between their own lives and the text students accepted the challenge and met much success" (Gillespie, 2005). (This is not a real email; this student's parent enthusiastically support-

Student Journal Entries

December 12, 2007

Some days, this project doesn't even feel like work. I love my topic. Today our assignment was to make either an activity book or a restaurant placemat for kids' games and puzzles about our topics. Ferret Guy made a maze and some word searches and some fake pet want ads. Toilet Paper girl had facts about how much tp we use in a year. Gross. One girl found pictures of the most famous rollercoasters for a matching game. I asked if I could make a touch and feel children's book for gymnastics and have the leotard fabric and the mat foam and chalk and all. She said yes. I wonder if she'll say no to *any* ideas I suggest for this project![7]

December 14, 2007

Besides this writing thing, the other thing we do is independent reading. Now we need to *combine* the two. It's called "fan fiction." My book has *nothing* to do with gymnastics and I couldn't *possibly* make a connection. She says to write in the "style" of the author. She says to insert another idea, like writing chapter 15 ½ or "the lost ending." I don't know what to do. None of the characters in my book are into gymnastics. Am I supposed to create a new character? Or just have her suddenly do a backflip and discover her hidden talent? Maybe Frodo is going to grab a PopTart out of his satchel in between bloody battles. Lovestruck teens in Sarah Dessen's book might get attacked by Sasquatch. Brian finds a hockey stick in the woods and it helps him survive in the wild (alongside the hatchet, of course). IT'S SO WEIRD.[8]

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ed him. It is a great example of how honoring the student's interests yields exceptional work.)

7 Two words: student choice. In her classic essay from 1983, "Writing and Reading from the Inside Out," Nancie Atwell (Newkirk & Kent 130) stresses the importance of creating a literate environment. When students make decisions about their own writing, they begin to define themselves as writers. Atwell writes, "By *literate* environment I mean a place where people read, write, and talk about reading and writing; where everybody can be student and teacher; where everybody can come inside."

8 The demands of multigenre writing stretch writers' minds to new possibilities in the same way that the rhyme and meter of a sonnet bring a poet to

December 15, 2007
I started my fan fiction. It was actually really fun. I didn't have to think up the details because my book gave me so many good ideas. I liked imitating my author's voice. It made me feel like a real writer.

How Hard is Writing? A Cinematic Answer

In the movie, "A River Runs Through It," a young boy painstakingly writes an essay. He nervously hands it to his father who, in the serious silence of a sacred study, reads it solemnly. "Fine," the father says. "Now cut it in half."

Back to his writing, the boy obediently begins again. Clearly, this hadn't been the first pronouncement as such by his father. The boy made it half the length.

A second visit to the father yields a somewhat better response. A barely perceptible nod, perhaps. Even a smile? Now the answer: "Better. Now cut it in half." Write. Revise. Repeat.

Is this what writing is? Is it that painful, that repetitive, that unrewarding? Is it that difficult? I'd like to keep it as a secret to students, so it doesn't take their hope away, but I think good writing really *is* that hard. Good writing is still about E.B. White's first rule in the infamous *Elements of Style*: "Be clear."[9]

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a word s/he might never have found. In the article "What the Fic?", authors Cheryl Truman and Heather Chapman (2006) explore a genre of increasing popularity: Fan Fiction. It is a reader's way to become a writer. Readers of an already published work write new chapters, alternate endings, and create plot possibilities through generating new writing based on the book. Fan fiction allows students to become interpreters, imitators, and composers.

9 Multigenre writing is not a way to get away from conventions. All writing must communicate with precision and clarity. Multigenre writing is flexible, but not arbitrary. In "The Craft of Writing: Breaking Conventions," Cornelia Paraskevas (2004) writes, "Instead of seeing conventions as absolute rules, we should see them as ways writers help readers make meaning. …instead of seeing unconventional use as an error, we can see it as rhetorical, as intent to craft language and text" (Paraskevas 2004). Students learn that writing is made up of a series of decisions, that language can be manipulated, and that the "rules"—even grammar rules—can work to the writer's advantage.

A Teacher's Instructions about Multigenre Expectations, Outlined[10]

I. Pick a topic
   a. you have to like it for at least 4 weeks
   b. no switching

II. Research
   a. don't plagiarize
   b. keep track of resources
   c. find a ton of things
      i. don't use them all at once

III. Write an introduction of the topic from its point of view
   a. ignore how strange this feels and just do it
      i. it's kind of funny, actually

IV. Pay attention to the elements of persuasion! (We'll have specific lessons in class):
   a. figure out what is debatable about your topic
      i. it can't just be why wakeboarding's cool
      i. it can't just compare one Poptart to another
      i. it has to be research-based, not opinion-based

V. Show both sides of the issue

VI. Look up Aristotle and logos, ethos, and pathos and figure out how to put them into your paper.
   a. logos = facts. That's easy.
   b. pathos = emotions. That's easy. Get your reader to *care*.
   c. ethos = credibility. This is harder, but you'll get it. Convince your reader that you're an expert, and the very best person in the room to write your paper because:

10 Traditional academic writing often starts with an outline, particularly expository "essay" forms. In "Rewriting the Essay: After Almost Five Centuries, a Familiar Genre Stands at a Crossroads," Julia Keller (2001) explores how the essay has transformed from a purely academic form to a genre of its own. The multigenre approach to classic forms like the essay encourages students to go beyond the outline and explore the different ways of communicating.

i. you know your stuff
i. you've done your homework
i. you won't lie.

VII. Write a real persuasion paper and see what happens.
a. I know it feels like "real writing" that we weren't going to do, but stick with it.
i. formal writing is a genre too
i. it's the type of writing you'll need to master for other classes and for college
i. it'll be fine. You're all experts

Student Conversation After Persuasion Assignment Outline Day

S1: I knew there'd be a catch.
S2: I don't want to write a real paper.
S1: Maybe it'll be easier because we already wrote so much. I have tons of research.
S2: I wonder if I can use some stories and cool stuff I found when I researched.
S1: She'll say yes. She always says yes.
S2: That makes it harder.
S1: Ask her how to do it.
S2: She'll say what she always says: "However you want."
S1: Just give me a rubric or something.[11]

11 In her article, "Learning to Let Them Learn: Yielding Power to Students in a Literacy Methods Course," Cynthia McCallister noted, "Don't do the walking for your students; they need to learn to walk for themselves." (286) There is a delicate balance between giving students power of decision and giving them direction. I give as much power of decision to the students as I can, hoping that the freedom helps them move from anxiety to a sense of power with their creative choices.

Obituary: Write about something that has "died" in relation to your topic

The Death of the Essay
About 1500 – about 2000

(d.o.b. debatable, though most concur that the death has definitely occurred)

Age 500+ years, originally of France, borne of Michel de Montaigne. The name, meaning "trials," reflects its past up until its somewhat predictable death. Some remember it as meditative and prescriptive. The essay was preceded in death by many supporters, including Joseph Addison, William Haslitt, Jonathan Swift. The essay is survived by Patricia Hampl, Thomas Lynch, Annie Dillard, Joan Didion. In recent years, its identity was shaken by such writers as David Sedaris, Anne Lamott and Ander Monson. Critics such as Julia Keller (2001) suggest the demise comes from inattention to the essay's core of being: "its stately grace and earnest reflection… they are serious and thoughtful explorations of works of literature or aspects of the human condition." Still, Michael Steinberg and others support the death of the essay in favor of a different definition of the truth which had always held the essay's esteem: "This has nothing to do with literal truth… whether it's literally true or not makes no difference to the reader" (as cited in Keller, 2001). A compromise is given by University of Chicago professor W. Mitchell: "The essay is a mixed genre—poetic, rhetorical, personal, argumentative. I think of writing as an extension of thinking" (as cited in Keller, 2001). At the sad news of the loss of the essay, popular essayist Patricia Hampl still holds hope: "There is a bedrock of delight, I think, in the personal essayist. I don't mean cheerfulness. I mean the delight of the appetite" (as cited in Keller, 2001). Services will be delayed until the death of the essay is confirmed.[1]

1 Oddly, the obituary is a fun form to explore. In "Giving Life to Tales of Death, but Sticking to Nonfiction," Thomas Gorman (2002) discusses the craft of the obituary and its uniquely simple power of communication. This entry also highlights Keller's (2001) concerns about the essay as a dying (or dead) form. When I see how well the obituary form communicates part of my research, I cannot imagine a better genre to use.

What Does it Take? A Multigenre Recipe
1 solid and interesting topic
Several hours of research on history of topic
Variety of stories, anecdotes, poems, ideas, images
equal measures of:
    logos
    ethos
    pathos
At least one controversy
Solid knowledge of different perspectives

Mix the following together and create several different pieces from the results. Use each "dish" to present different facts, ideas, and reflections about the topic. Repetition causes premature spoiling. Serve with enthusiasm.[12]

12 Tom Romano (2000) and Melinda Putz (2006) both assert that a key to success (and to meaningful assessment) is not in the quantity of genres used, but in students' appropriate and effective use of particular genres. Putz (2006) writes, "I want to learn something new from each piece in the paper." This is the key to a good multigenre "recipe."

A Teacher's Attempt at Assessing: Let the Students Decide

Multigenre Project Menu

Choose from the following menu to create your own portfolio for assessment. Put in your desired point value for each week's choices. No point value can be less than 5% or more than 30% of your grade. Make your best work count!

Requirement	Your Choices	Precentage
Week one: either the biography, the acceptance speech, vital stats form, FAQ sheet, or the campaign sheet		
Week two: either the games and activities book/placemat, the "two sides of an issue" debate, or the newspaper advice column		
Week three: either the fan fiction, the obituary, or the advertisement		
Week four: all students must hand in their persuasion paper		
Options: hand in 3 other items from any category or the in class activities, such as poetry, art work, web pages, playing cards, or the related "package"		
		100%

13

Labyrinthine Conclusions—A Teacher's Reflections

If someone asked me to name how multigenre writing can positively affect student learning (and someone probably will ask me this some day), I would say that I hope students

13 And to the burning question: "How should I grade these?" I answer what I so often did to students: "However you want." Every situation is different. I created a chart similar to this one so that students could create a final portfolio that would represent several genres, highlight their best work, and give the best work the most credit. Assessment should emphasize these most important elements of the multigenre project: students become writers of many pages and multiple genres; students become willing to experiment with word and form; students create projects representing their own topics and interests; students identify themselves as writers.

would learn that words are theirs to use to communicate what's important to them, and that there is a way to say anything they need to say—at least one way—and that even if it's a way nobody has ever tried before, it can be the best way for them, at that moment, from that exact place and time and perspective, and I would mention that multigenre writing assures each student that her unique way of seeing things *matters*, and that the way he sees something fitting into the world affects the world and that is enough to make it important and meaningful and real, because even this genre of the labyrinthine sentence is the right way to write this, because multigenre writing opens up neverending possibilities of expression, and even if I use up every word and every punctuation mark I can think of, the sentence cannot be long enough to represent what I think the possibilities are. Never. Ending. And that's exciting.

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Beyond the Fields of Fire:
Lessons from Ambrose Bierce's War Memoirs and Narratives

Carl Nelson

Ambrose Gwinnett Bierce (1842-1914?) held no academic post, but he defined his own literary field with a distinct brand of witticisms, newspaper exposés, and macabre short stories. As a young topographical engineer officer[1] in the American Civil War, Bierce observed and sketched land features that were an important reconnaissance measure for his superiors. Often he fought on the fields that he had drawn only hours before. Bierce was understandably marked by these bloody contests that did so much to inform his later writings.

Indeed, war was something that defined and divided Ambrose Bierce. He reveled in the camaraderie that he shared with his fellow soldiers, but he also derided the politicians and generals whose poor leadership led to the slaughter of thousands on the western theater battlefields from Tennessee to Georgia.[2] After the war, Bierce directed much criticism toward his former commanders who seemed to embrace the war in their memoirs. In particular, Bierce attacked Union General Oliver Otis Howard for his incompetence that led to the near-decimation of his brigade at the battle of Pickett's Mill.[3] Bierce sought to correct the war record so that the common soldiers' sufferings – not the generals' glories – appeared foremost in the accounts about the fighting.[4]

Sometimes a critic, often a writer, always a veteran who

is concerned with memory; this is the Bierce that we would do well to remember. As this Nation defined the ultimate purposes of the American Civil War in the post bellum period, Bierce arrived at another meaning that he demanded that his readers understand – that a violent past is soon forgotten to a Nation that is involved in present conflict.[5] Bierce's writing output bears strong evidence of a troubled psyche that, no doubt, stems from his own war experiences. As he edited the minutiae of regimental histories, and composed verse refutations in his newspaper columns to self-promoting veterans, Bierce also recorded his personal sufferings in memoir sketches and short stories where he confronts his audiences with the brutal nature of combat.

Bierce forces us to realize the battlefields of the past as a warning to avoid similar contests in the future. As Bierce educates his reader about his war experiences, so educators ought to seek out these perspectives from students and encourage a similar literary dialogue in the classroom. One approach is asking students what they perceive and know about war literature and asking them to compare their assumptions to Bierce's work.

Throughout this article I offer interpretive insights on how Bierce's autobiographical sketch, "What I Saw of Shiloh" (1881), and his comparable short story, "The Coup de Grâce" (1889), offer readers the visual and visceral connections that make his literary lessons hard to forget. Harvard President and Historian Drew Gilpin Faust adds further context to the literary and historical contributions of Bierce's work that helps readers understand that, beyond the circumstances of the Civil War and current conflicts, the brutality of war is universal.

Even though academics *should* turn their thoughts and energies toward peaceful notions, Bierce challenges us all to see the War before us. There is a pertinent discussion today in academia about how best to engage returning veterans from Afghanistan and Iraq who, like Bierce, frequently revisit their troubling war experiences. While Bierce's war works do prompt unease for veterans who long to forget their fighting, I see this literary approach as something like Dr. W.H.R. Rivers's (1864-1922) *talking cure*[6] that encouraged World War I soldiers to

share their fears and find some closure and resolution in their former conflict.

I have introduced my composition students to Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" to help them explore, among other topics, the importance of close reading, the question of a reliable narrator, narrative time and structure, and the ethical concerns of Bierce's main character, Farquhar; an Alabama planter who finds that war is not a game that he can manipulate, but a naïve pursuit of glory that leads to his hanging.

One of my former writing students identified closely with Farquhar because he had found himself in a similar fight for his life. A non-traditional student (whom I will refer to here as "Will") mentioned to me that he had served with a local Minnesota National Guard in Iraq. Will had entered service to pay for school, but he also enlisted because he felt a strong sense of service. While he had developed a considerable connection with his comrades during his tour, he had no desire to return to combat. Although Will said he recognized the inner-motivations that Farquhar had to serve his own country, he felt compelled to relate his experiences because, unlike Bierce's main character, Will was comparatively fortunate to walk away from his war (although his hearing loss from near-miss rocket-propelled-grenades is a constant reminder to him of his close calls).

When I suggested that Will read Bierce's memoir sketch, "What I Saw of Shiloh," he considered the work outside of class. He later said that Bierce seems the typical veteran who remembers what happened, if only to try to rationalize and remove these thoughts from his mind. Indeed, we both agree that Bierce may have used his writing as an exercise to work his own sordid war details out of his mind. I suggested to Will that he write about his own experiences at some point, but he thought that more time should pass before he makes his writing contributions. For now, he is relating his experiences to others, and he has formed an important connection with Bierce's literature as a point of expression – maybe even as a way to help himself understand his own time of conflict. I'm hopeful that Will finds the time and place to commit his accounts to record so that we can learn from

his experiences as we do from Bierce.

Bierce's memoirs are every bit journalistic in his sights-and-sounds account of the events on the battlefield. He establishes truth in his work through his own eye-witness accounts, but Bierce also probes the greater psychological depths through his treatment of soldiers in his short stories. In "What I Saw of Shiloh," Bierce applies his considerable military knowledge to convey the soldierly dispositions that he encounters in the field. His account includes brief reflections about the rank-and-file soldiers who ponder their preparation before an engagement, and the staff officers who demand action even if they are themselves uncertain about the outcome of their decisions in battle.

Of particular interest in this memoir are Bierce's vivid snapshots that set the scenes for the reader from the movements of an awakening camp, to the awkward formations of the men who await their individual fates, to the electrical energy along the battle line before the fighting that brings about a gruesome aftermath. During these intense moments, Bierce reveals something of his personal thoughts as a soldier, and the similar thought progressions and pre-battle psyches that his comrades may have shared with him through his narrative device of rhetorical questions:

> A few inaudible commands from an invisible leader had placed us in order of battle. But where was the enemy? Where, too, were the riddled regiments that we had come to save? Had our other divisions arrived during the night and passed the river to assist us? or were we to oppose our paltry five thousand breasts to an army flushed with victory? What protected our right? Who lay upon our left? Was there really anything in our front? (Joshi and Schultz, *Sole* 17) [7]

This pensive soldier, Bierce, grows unnerved by the lack of information about his purpose on the field. He moves from the calm and collected *we have come to reinforce* to the question of *who will reinforce us?* Bierce is concerned with his soldier's mental and physical positions in his work, and as he thoroughly locates them by offering abundant description, he does not lose

his audience in excess military jargon. Bierce makes his writings clear and accessible to many readers, but there is still much to consider below the surface, and I often asked my students why he may have chosen to include certain details, and why he may have chosen to omit others.

Even as Bierce clearly situates the reader on his battlefield, the educator should consider how to place Bierce in context for students. Clearly, the divide between the Civil War and the Afghanistan and Iraq war is wide, but there is always a bridge. I agree with Faust's assertion that soldiers are trained to overcome their instincts not to kill. While some soldiers embrace warfare for a time, this still does not keep these same warriors from questioning the ultimate purpose of their conflict. Faust informs readers about perceptions of death in the mid-19th century in her recent book, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*. Within the corpus of Bierce's war work, Faust relates that "deaths – executions, suicides, battle casualties – constitute the central theme of Bierce's war writing, and indeed he saw death, not glory or political purpose, as the fundamental reality of war itself" (198).

Faust also explores the soldier's redefinitions of mortality in the wake of a life-threatening engagement. Her revealing look at the Nation's changing attitudes toward what constitutes a good and bad death provides a better interpretive context for Bierce's literary mechanisms in his war writings. Faust calls attention to the prevailing concerns among soldiers about dying a *good death*:

> As men saw themselves mirrored in the faces of those expiring around them, they struggled to come to terms with the possibility and the significance of their own annihilation. Dying assumed clear preeminence over killing in the soldier's construction of his emotional and moral universe. (6)

Bierce leads his reader through the woods and into the fields of combat through his description of the frontal assaults and flanking movements at Shiloh.[8] He concerns himself and his reader with the tactical considerations and possibilities when

he accompanies his men in line of battle on the battlefield, but as Faust relates about the common soldier, Bierce seems more anxious about the carnage and death when he advances as a skirmisher[9] before the general engagement. Consider an instance where Bierce orders his platoon toward a wood-concealed Confederate battle line:

> …in the exercise of my discretion [I] deployed my platoon, pushing it forward at a run, with trailed arms,[10] to strengthen the skirmish line, which I overtook some thirty or forty yards from the wood. Then – I can't describe it – the forest seemed all at once to flame up and disappear with a crash like that of a great wave upon the beach – a crash that expired in hot hissings, and the sickening "spat" of lead against flesh. A dozen of my brave fellows tumbled over like ten-pins. Some struggled to their feet, only to go down again, and yet again. (*Sole* 19-20)

Now it is the reader's time to wince at the proximity of Bierce's soldiers to an armed enemy presence; his men are less than forty yards from scores of muzzles that appear to be fired in a volley. There is little error in the accuracy of these "hissing rounds" that maim and kill as Bierce's simile of a "great wave" forces the reader to see the dead and wounded pitching backwards and forwards in their uncertain footing. Just as some soldiers realize the adrenaline rush of the advance and escape of the unwounded, others reel when they are hit, and after falling they try helplessly to aright themselves, but their bloody transformations to battle casualties are nearly complete.

Through his grotesque descriptors, Bierce has his reader ponder these men who are reduced to a sprawling, bloody mass. Even more visually compelling is his shifting consideration from the distance and intervals of his soldiers to the proximity of the dead and dying, especially Bierce's emphasis on the sufferings of a mortally-wounded Federal sergeant that he and his fellow skirmishers nearly fall over on the field. The psychological resonance, for the reader, speaks to the residual horrors and tortures that Bierce and other survivors will likely ponder well after the fight.

> Men? There were men enough; all dead, apparently, except one, who lay near where I had halted my platoon to await the slower movement of the line – a Federal sergeant, variously hurt, who had been a fine giant in his time. He lay face upward, taking in his breath in convulsive, rattling snorts, and blowing it out in sputters of froth which crawled creamily down his cheeks, piling itself alongside his neck and ears. A bullet had clipped a groove in his skull, above the temple; from this the brain protruded in bosses, dropping off in flakes and strings. I had not previously known one could get on, even in this unsatisfactory fashion, with so little brain. One of my men, whom I knew for a womanish fellow, asked if he should put his bayonet through him. Inexpressibly shocked by the cold-blooded proposal, I told him I thought not; it was unusual, and too many were looking. (19)

Again, Bierce's battlefield exposure is in focus for the viewer. His picture is that of a once-healthy and sterling lad whose breaths are now numbered. Yet it is Bierce's treatment of sound and sight descriptors—"convulsive, rattling snorts," "froth crawl[ing] creamily down his cheeks," and his "brain protrud[ing] in bosses, dropping off in flakes and strings"—that moves the reader from the visual to the visceral. Bierce's writing moves the reader because it is so graphic, so strong, and so definitive. His word choice connotes something about this man's baser presence – like the helpless bull that is stunned in a slaughter shop by a maul blow to the head – both are incapable of expressing pain except through inarticulate and uncoordinated expressions.

That Bierce's subordinate wants to end this man's lingering and suffering is clear to the reader, but his choice of a bayonet is highly objectionable. Bierce has reason to be shocked by his subordinate's willingness to kill his fellow soldier in such an agonizing way, but then the man is already experiencing great pain. That Bierce does not delineate the Federal sergeant's final outcome makes the reader uneasy about the consequences of war and its lingering effects.

If Bierce refuses to dwell on the extent of his own mental

anguish over the fighting in this memoir sketch, the reader might do well to consider Bierce's short stories as a ground for his unrestrained contemplations about war. Quite often the narrative topics in his memoirs and select short stories bear a striking resemblance. From his descriptions of "What I Saw of Shiloh," Bierce establishes truth and an imagery investiture for the reader from his personal experiences as a warrior, but he also pauses to consider the wounded. Bierce is uncharacteristically concerned with the Federal sergeant's condition in his memoir, but Bierce explores a harsher reality through the imagery in his short story "The Coup de Grâce."

This war tale is an exploration of the unconscionable choices that a soldier is forced to make on the battlefield, and the psychological consequences that he faces because of his choices. Bierce observes the ethical dilemma that Captain Madwell faces as he reflects on the mercy-killing of his friend – a similar action that Bierce forbids of his subordinate in "What I Saw of Shiloh." While Sergeant Bierce is hesitant and even antagonistic toward his comrade for suggesting such a notion, he continues to explore this concern in a fictional genre where he does not have to be concerned with the repercussions of his battlefield actions, and where Bierce has the complete authority to control his characters and arrange their final outcomes.

"The Coup de Grâce" plot involves two former civilian friends, Captain Downing Madwell and Sergeant Caffal Halcrow, who serve in the same infantry company. The two remain on amiable terms despite their need to obey the military protocol that divides officers from non-commissioned officers. While Madwell and Caffal share a fraternal bond, Caffal is a biological brother to Major Creede Halcrow. Bierce describes Creede as saturnine in temperament and disdainful toward Madwell long before the war's opening salvos (Bierce 320).[11] These two harbor grudges toward each other on the field, but Sergeant Halcrow manages an uneasy peace between his brother and his good friend.

Following battle, Captain Downing Madwell finds his friend mortally wounded and far from aid. Unable to comfort

his friend, Captain Madwell decides he must euthanize Sergeant Halcrow – to free him from additional suffering.

A number of passages are worthy for consideration in a comparison, with additional excerpts from "What I Saw of Shiloh." Bierce crafts a panorama image through his use of intricate detail about the battle-spoiled fields that relates a broader destructive contest before he focuses his reader on the personal conflicts between the main characters. An excerpt from "The Coup de Grâce" appears first:

> As far as one could see through the forests, among the splintered trees, lay wrecks of men and horses. Among them moved the stretcher-bearers, gathering and carrying away the few who showed signs of life… (319).

A parallel exists in Bierce's memoir sketch about Shiloh:

> Dead horses were everywhere; a few disabled caissons, or limbers, reclining on one elbow, as it were; ammunition wagons standing disconsolate behind four or six sprawling mules. (*Sole* 19)

The details diverge a bit, but there is truth in these works about the universal destruction of men and animals on the Civil War battlefields. This storm-tossed landscape of lead and iron and the heated determination of both sides bring about the grim landscape that Bierce has his reader see, and one that he himself saw.

Bierce condenses his war experience into a snapshot of the final outcomes of one battle in "The Coup de Grâce." The narrator explains that even the wounded who have suffered the most are neglected and left to linger on the battlefield:

> Most of the wounded had died of neglect while the right to minister to their wants was in dispute. It is an army regulation that the wounded must wait; the best way to care for them is to win the battle. It must be confessed that victory is a distinct advantage to a man requiring attention, but many do not live to avail themselves of it. ("Coup" 319)

Often there were far too many casualties to be cared for and still others lay wounded and obscured from view. Bierce's vision could well inform Faust's grisly finding that "bodies hidden by woods or ravines, [were] left to the depredations of hogs or wolves or time..." and at Shiloh, nearby inhabitants informed one U.S. official charged with soldier burials that their free foraging hogs "were no longer fit to be eaten 'on account of their living off the dead' " (102, 225; Ward 120).

Bierce's "The Coup de Grâce" forces readers to reconsider their conceptions of war and what it entails. Bierce places the Captain and the reader in a ravine not far from the open field:

> Sergeant Halcrow was mortally hurt. His clothing was deranged; it seemed to have been violently torn apart... […] The only visible wound was a wide, ragged opening in the abdomen. It was defiled with earth and leaves. Protruding from it was a small loop of small intestine. In all his experience Captain Madwell had not seen a wound like this. He could neither conjecture how it was made nor explain the attendant circumstances – the strangely torn clothing, the parted belt, the besmirching of the white skin. He knelt and made a closer examination. When he rose to his feet, he turned his eyes in different directions as if looking for an enemy. Fifty yards away, on the crest of a low, thinly wooded hill, he saw several dark objects moving about among the fallen men – a herd of swine. […] The sufferer moaned and his lips moved convulsively. The froth that ran from them had a tinge of blood. (321-23)

Bierce introduces the civilian reader to a host of ethical concerns that attend Captain Madwell's actions. First Bierce introduces the disparity in rank – effectively placing Madwell above Halcrow in military and mortal terms. As a captain, a line-officer who directly commands Halcrow, Madwell leads his company into battle and his men's lives are *in his hands* metaphorically speaking, and this continues now in a literal sense. Even as a friend, Madwell sees that he must do something for the dying Halcrow at his feet.

Bierce locates, for the reader, the sufferings and misery of these two men on a portion of a field that is part of a greater landscape. He also illustrates for the reader that the physical and psychological sufferings of the soldiers do not end the moment the battle is over. Consider what Madwell feels he must do to end the sufferings for his friend Caffal:

> Captain Madwell rose to his feet and drew his sword from the scabbard […] He stooped and with his left hand tore away the dying man's shirt, rose and placed the point of the sword just over the heart. […] Grasping the hilt with both hands, he thrust downward with all his strength and weight. The blade sank into the man's body – through his body into the earth… […] At that moment three men stepped silently forward from behind a clump of young trees which had concealed their approach. Two were hospital attendants and carried a stretcher. The third was Major Creede Halcrow. (323)

Although Bierce hides his true feelings when he orders his subordinate to leave the Federal sergeant alone, he does the opposite in this short-story. He encourages his reader to see the emotional strains that Captain Madwell faces in his private moments before he overcomes his sorrow just long enough to dispatch his friend, Sergeant Halcrow. Indeed, Madwell has recourse to be emotional, and this speaks to his genuine concern for his soldiers, and the return of a human condition that has been stripped of him in the course of his duties, now that his *men* are no longer standing at his shoulders, but lying at his feet.
The irony is that Captain Madwell's murder of Sergeant Halcrow is the equivalent to Major Halcrow's orders that Madwell and his company should hold the ravine. The order is clearly a death sentence for Captain Madwell and his men, and one wonders if Major Halcrow considers his hand in his own brother's fate, beyond his loathing for his subordinate as he says:

> Captain, the colonel directs that you push your company to the head of this ravine and hold your place there until recalled. I need hardly apprise you of the dangerous character of the move-

> ment, but if you wish, you can, I suppose, turn over the command to your first-lieutenant… (321)[12]

Despite the ultimate order that comes from the regimental colonel (presumably via courier to his subordinates), the major has the right to refuse the order that will place his men in an inordinate amount of danger, or appeal to the colonel for a clarification of his tactical intentions. Bierce does not allow these possibilities in his narrative, and he has his Major Halcrow send Captain Madwell and his unit on this dreadful movement. While the mutual disdain between the major and the captain is apparent, the major also brings his sergeant-brother under direct fire. While passing the war burden up or down the chain of command is not a new concept, it has a personal consequence for both the major and the captain by the narrative's conclusion. Both lose a dead brother-in-arms, and Bierce affords his characters and his reader little consolation in his short story. The reader, at this point, wonders whether the major saw the captain's actions, and whether the sergeant would have had an opportunity to survive his grievous wounds.

Bierce leaves us hanging in the end with a number of difficult questions. We assume that Downing might himself be killed for euthanizing Caffal if Creede saw the act. Yet, does Creede enter the scene expressly to help his dying brother, or to appear as Bierce's literary portent of Downing's demise? Even though Creede does not directly dispatch Caffal as Downing does, he is just as guilty of fratricide for committing Madwell's unit (in which Caffal serves) to certain death. Perhaps as Caffal cries out in Bierce's work, so do we because we are so uncertain about what the end of the story means.

Perhaps Bierce cannot relate the full details of the war experience in any one story or through all of his war writings, but he offers crucial insights that cut through the propagandistic notions and rhetoric that push soldiers toward war. As a newspaperman, Bierce is famous for berating his editor-employer William Randolph Hearst for promoting the U.S. involvement in the 1898 Spanish-American War. Although this *not-so*-splen-

did-little-war[13] soon disappeared from the global scene, we are in the midst of a similar, but more involved conflict today.

Admittedly, Bierce defined his own life and works by his soldiering in the American Civil War, but he had difficulty reconciling his war experience for the rest of his life. If Bierce's literary intent is to shake some sense into his readers, then he has done so through "What I Saw of Shiloh" and "The Coup de Grâce". Bierce rejects the rhetoric of *a war for emancipation*, or *a war to bring democracy to nations* so that readers see that war is a convenient construct for politicians and profiteers to benefit from the soldiers' sufferings.

This is precisely why Bierce ought to be revisited in secondary and post-secondary classrooms. He informs both the peaceably inclined and the war-prone of what lies ahead in the contest of arms, and he also provides non-combatants with some estimation of the loss that many veterans face. The purpose of my recommendation of Bierce's work is not to dredge up the horrific images of conflict, but rather to suggest that educators seek out the veteran's voices in the classroom that they do not always hear, even prompt them to contribute what they are hesitant to relate, so that we might better understand their struggles and how to avoid future conflicts.

While students may not always freely offer their positions on war, they will see that Bierce is a willing teacher who demands that his students shed their prejudices[14] to better understand what war is and what it will always be.

Notes

1. Topographical Engineer Officers during the American Civil War observed and reconnoitered the area of a contested region or battleground to sketch maps and determine *the lay of the land* for the general staff. Bierce acted in this capacity for General William B. Hazen until the author received a serious head-wound at the Battle of Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, in 1864 (Fatout 391).

2. At Kennesaw Mountain, Georgia, in 1864, Bierce re-

ceived a near-mortal gunshot wound to the head. The ball was never extracted from his temple, and his recovery from such a grievous wound is no less than miraculous. Despite his recovery, Bierce suffered from serious headaches for the rest of his life (Morris 88).

3. See Bierce's memoir sketch, "The Crime at Pickett's Mill" (1888) (*Sole* 37-45).

4. Michael Schaefer considers Bierce's treatment of the official military record and the biographies of high-ranking generals in his excellent essay, "Ambrose Bierce on the Construction of Military History."

5. For more on the residual sufferings of a Nation in the wake of the American Civil War, read Drew Gilpin Faust's excellent history, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War*.

6. See "'The Blameless Physician': Narrative and Pain, Sassoon and Rivers" by Robert Hemmings.

7. This study refers to Ambrose Bierce's memoir sketches that are edited and collected by S.T. Joshi and David E. Schultz in *A Sole Survivor: Bits of Autobiography* (1998), and Bierce's personal letters as edited and collected by the same editors in *A Much Misunderstood Man: Selected Letters of Ambrose Bierce* (2003). Subsequent references will be by book title.

8. The Battle of Shiloh, Tennessee (April 6-7, 1862), was a particularly gruesome contest in the western theater that resulted in a combined Confederate/Union casualty figure of 23,746 killed, wounded, and missing (United States).

9. Skirmishers are a varied group of soldiers that take wider intervals than the shoulder-to-shoulder formation of troops in the main battle-line. These soldiers often see heavy fighting as an advance element probing an enemy line. Commanders deploy skirmishers to reconnoiter the enemy presence before committing a larger body of troops (Hardee).

10. "Trail Arms" is the command for a soldier to grasp his musket in his right hand and hold it parallel to the ground with his arm nearly outstretched (Hardee).

11. All of Bierce's short stories in this study appear in

The Complete Short Stories of Ambrose Bierce that is compiled and edited by Ernest J. Hopkins (1970).

12. That Major Halcrow details the danger of Captain Madwell's position in the ravine speaks to his disdain for his superior and subordinate in the same instance. The colonel's judgment is poor because he ought to foresee that a coordinated Confederate attack will lead to a reversal of Madwell's unit. As the Confederates force Madwell's unit from the crest of the ravine to the bottom, and to an elevation disadvantage, the attackers will have fire superiority over Madwell's unit that must follow the ravine bottom to their only obvious line of retreat.

13. From a quote by Ambassador John Hay to Theodore Roosevelt about the brevity of the Spanish-American War (Bethel).

14. Bierce offers some measure of his world view in an excerpt from his treatise, "To Train a Writer" (1899):

> Happiness should disclose itself to his enlarging intelligence as the end and purpose of life, and love as the only means to happiness. He should free himself of all doctrines, theories, etiquettes, politics, simplifying his life and mind, attaining clarity with breadth and unity with height. To him a continent should not seem wide, nor a century long. And it would be needful that he know and have an ever present consciousness that this is a world of fools and rogues, blind with superstition, tormented with envy, consumed with vanity, selfish, false, cruel, cursed with illusions – frothing mad! (*Sole* 248)

*There is a renewed interest in Bierce studies, and his works are available in a host of printed and e-text editions. Arguably the best online collection of Bierce's works and related writings is through the *Ambrose Bierce Project* edited by Craig A. Warren and hosted by Penn State, Erie; the Behrend College: www.ambrosebierce.org.

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Excerpt from *Capturing the Dead: The Visual Imagery and Cross-Continuities of Ambrose Bierce's Civil War Memoir and Short Stories and Mathew Brady's Photography*

Filling the Attic

Alexandra Glynn

Let's climb up into the attic and see if we can't think of some ways to improve the textbooks and worksheets we assign our students. Perhaps we are thinking "I am only teaching grammar here, no need to get carried away and go shop the rummage sales for something interesting to put in the attic." But, if we think about it, perhaps in teaching grammar and some of the seemingly more uncreative areas of our courses, this is exactly what we need. For in teaching grammar, one uses example sentences. One points to example forms. And one expects students to write sentences displaying their grasp of grammar. The question is, out of what sort of sentences are we taking our examples? For it is likely that what we take for examples will come back to us again in the sentences students write for us and for the rest of our society later in their daily work.

To illustrate. Today I wish to teach my students SVO. To do this, I give them this sonnet from Shakespeare:

> From fairest creatures we desire increase,
> That thereby beauty's rose might never die,
> But as the riper should by time decease,
> His tender heir might bear his memory:
> But thou, contracted to thine own bright eyes,
> Feed'st thy light'st flame with self-substantial fuel,
> Making a famine where abundance lies,
> Thyself thy foe, to thy sweet self too cruel.

Thou that art now the world's fresh ornament
And only herald to the gaudy spring,
Within thine own bud buriest thy content
And, tender churl, makest waste in niggarding.
Pity the world, or else this glutton be,
To eat the world's due, by the grave and thee.

Then I give them these instructions: "To make things rhyme, or to give more weight to certain things, poets play with syntax. Sometimes they put the adjectives after the noun they modify. They change the order of the verbs, subjects, objects, and so on, and they put clauses of explanation in-between the subject and the verb, so that you, in essence, have to 'wait to get the verb', or some other part of speech that you normally would expect to appear in another part of the sentence. In the sonnet above, find at least three 'mistakes' of syntax in sentences or parts of sentences that include at least a noun and a verb. Copy out that part of the sonnet in which you found the mistake, exactly as it is written. Then below it, rewrite the phrase, using the same words, into more 'natural' word order for English. Remember that the subject can at times be 'you-understood' and so you will have to write that in. The first one has been done for you."

S V S V O S V O Io

1. From fairest creatures we desire increase,
   We desire increase from fairest creatures.
2.
3.

As students do this exercise, they do not necessarily have to understand all of the sonnet, or know its "meaning." They simply are learning SVO. So they are exposed to Shakespeare in a very easy and non-aggressive way. But if we furnish our students with exercises such as the above in our teaching of grammar, we familiarize our students with some Shakespeare as we learn grammar, rather than with random sentences. When

the blocks of texts with which we review rhetorical features are rhetorical masterpieces, we imprint those forms and ways in some small measure into our students' working collections of features, words, and manners upon which they must draw when they write.

If a student's mind is like an attic, why not clutter it up with some rusty antiques, faded stock certificates, costume jewelry, and yellowing silk? It might make for more interesting cleaning when one tells them to finally organize that attic in a paper. Of course, the debaters among our students will argue that one man's clutter is another man's organization. Be that as it is, right now, it often seems as if the attics are filled with reams of IBM data sheets, with an occasional tattered briefcase in the corner. What we expose our students to, even in some of the most seemingly uncreative, non-rhetorical portions of our courses, comes out later; it will either be a fascinating dress-up addressing questions, or displaying language that shows an awareness of the conversations about who we are and what our society needs from us, or it will be a stack of briefcases stuffed with plain white sheets of copy. Or, maybe, something in-between.

Idea Exchange

This section represents a venue for sharing the work of our teaching peers. More to the point, what follows are suggestions for solving specific teaching problems. There is more than a small chance that some of these practical tips might be useful for those of us who teach. Should you wish more information on one or more of these tips, contact the author at the e-mail address attached to the tip.

***

I've told my students before that I have always wondered which parts of speech are most important. And I have heard it said often: nouns and verbs. But I'm a doubter. So with them I like to look at this song from the war of 1812. Through it, one can sing with one's own throat which parts of speech are more weighty than others by watching where one's own mind will go with different parts of speech to give the musical emphasis, and which parts of speech will be left without the stress; thereby one understands what others are doing with rhetoric, and where to go oneself, for power in language.

The song is written with what I call a triple meter. That is, the words go stress, unstress, unstress. And there is a pick-up note/beat "oh." Notice that every third word is stressed; in bold

below.

Oh, **say** can you **see**, by the **dawn's** ear-ly **light**, what so **proud**-ly we **hailed**.

Now, let's put new words in. For each, take a few seconds to scan the line so you know what words are going to be sung. Then sing it. As you sing it, circle the words for which you gave the emphasis in the same place as the bold words above. For an example, if the new words are: "Oh can you see, by the dawn's early light…" and you sang "**Oh** can you **see**", dragging the first two notes over the first syllable, then circle "Oh" and "see", but if you sang "Oh **can** you **see**", dragging the 2nd and 3rd notes over the second syllable, then circle "can" and "see" and so on. If we have 20 or so students, we can make a chart and see which words we are all choosing.

Here are our three new sentences with new words for you to sing and circle:

a. Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, how George saw a big bear as he ran through the forest.

b. Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, a bear ran through trees as he ran through the forest.

c. Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light, a bear through the trees running fast in the forest.

What do you notice? Which words do you want to give the beat to? What part of speech are those words? When you are faced with extra notes to go over a certain number of syllables, and thus find it necessary to give extra notes to a certain syllable, what parts of speech do you tend to want to give those extra notes to?

One can make as many examples as one wishes—it's often fascinating to come up with new sentences to sing without bringing in one's own prophecies of what might happen with

them. However, have all the students do the exercise and chart the results.

There are other things besides parts of speech that one can learn from this sort of exercise. For example, how does changing the word "George" to "I" in example "a" change your singing, if at all? Why?

Alexandra Glynn
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[Intriguing follow up—watch Obama's speeches. What is he doing, musically, sound-wise, emphasis wise, repetition-wise, with different parts of speech?]

Note: The Idea Exchange is now a regular feature of *The Minnesota English Journal*. Most teachers are astonishingly busy. Sitting down to write a long paper is out of the question for people with five or more preps per day. Thus, we want our readers to "think small" for a few minutes. Jot down on an e-mail message (or an enclosure in an e-mail message in "Word") to the *MEJ* editor a teaching tip, an idea about teaching a piece of literature that has worked for you with a particular audience, a writing prompt you've used to generate discussion, a strategy for developing discussion on a piece of literature, a writing assignment (along with the context you've created for it), a research exercise, or an effective way of dealing with the writing process or revision or mechanics. Label your e-mail "The Idea Exchange" and address it to straits@mnsu.edu.

Thanks in advance for contributing your ideas to this enterprise.

Bill Dyer

Contributors

Doug Annett is currently working as the Director of Residential Services for Opportunity Partners, a local non-profit organization that provides social services for people with disabilities. He recently received his M.Ed. in English Education from the University of Minnesota in August 2008. The article that he has he has written for MEJ represents his first published piece. In his spare time, he works on developing an on-line, multimedia art gallery featuring up-and-coming artists, writers, musicians, and filmmakers.

Paul Carney began teaching English at Minnesota State Community and Technical College - Fergus Falls in 1988. Throughout his tenure at MSCTC, he has taught courses in composition, literature, humanities, men's studies, criminology, and creative writing. He also has served as the college's assessment coordinator. Carney served as President of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English in 1994, and he currently is serving a second term as MCTE President during 2008-2009. He is a former fellow and board member of The Minnesota Writing Project, the state affiliate of The National Writing Project. In 2004, he joined the Minnesota Department of Education's Quality Teaching Network in Language Arts, a statewide K-16 network of English teachers. His research interests include assessment, inter-institutional college readiness alignment, and student self-assessment. He served as co-chair of Minnesota's P-16 Collaborative sub-

committee on college and workplace readiness for writing. He also serves on the Assessment Advisory Committee for the Minnesota Department of Education. Carney has presented his research on college readiness at The National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention (Nashville), The Higher Learning Commission (Chicago), and Education Trust (Washington, DC.). He is the developer and coordinator of Ready or Not Writing (readyornotwriting.org), an online "drop box" to which high school students submit essays to college English instructors for assessment and feedback. Recently, he launched the Roadside Poetry Project, a celebration of language in public space (www.roadsidepoetry.org). When he's not evaluating essays or hacking through the thicket of valid and valued assessment, Carney enjoys reading non-fiction, planting trees, listening to jazz, and watching "The Andy Griffith Show."

William D. Dyer has been teaching humanities, literature, and composition courses at Minnesota State University, Mankato, since 1981. A Ph.D. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, he pursues research interests in Latin American literature, Dickens, Shakespeare, writing across the curriculum, and collaborative learning. He serves on the board of HERA, a national organization for humanities education, and MCTE.

Alexandra Glynn is an adjunct instructor at St. Cloud Technical College where she teaches writing. She is also finishing a ten-year translation project called "Songs and Hymns of Zion." When she is not teaching she is translating, and researching music, critical pedagogy, English, and religion. She holds an M.A. in English from St. Cloud State University and an M.A. in Old Testament theology from Luther Seminary.

Scott Hall teaches Honors British literature and poetry at Irondale High School as well as courses at Anoka Ramsey Community College. Recognized as an NCTE Teacher of Excellence in 2007, he has collaborated with Bill Dyer on a number of Shakespeare presentations on the way to finishing a manuscript they are writing on teaching Shakespeare. Over the years,

he has collaborated with other mentors (Terry Flaherty at Minnesota State University, Mankato) and teachers (Steve Potts at Hibbing Community College) in developing his teaching interests in memoir, the literature and culture of the Vietnam War Era, and the teaching of literary theory and criticism. In the rare moments away from teaching or correcting papers, he continues to write songs and records them in his basement studio.

Elizabeth Kirchoff, a native of Detroit, Michigan, earned her B.S, in English, her first M.A in English, and her second M.A in TESL (all from St. Cloud State University), and her Ph. D. in Literacy from the University of Minnesota. She is currently an assistant professor in the English Department at Minnesota State University, Moorhead, where she teaches pedagogy, young adult literature, linguistics, and composition. Her research interests include identity issues in academia and the English language—particularly as spoken by northwestern Minnesotans. When she is not teaching, researching, prepping, or driving the long stretch of I-94 between her home in St. Cloud and dher office at MSUM, friends usually find her biking, hiking, gardening, antiquing, or putting together puzzles. Her essay for this issue has been chosen to recieve MEJ's annual $350 prize for this year's best submission to the journal.

Nickie Kranz has a Masters degree in English from Minnesota State University, Mankato. She is currently working for the Mayo Health System in the Education Center and is also teaching composition courses at Minnesota State University, Mankato, as adjunct faculty. As a graduate student, her primary area of interest was Medieval Studies, and her thesis is entitled "Seduction, Abandonment and Sorcery in Middle English Lyrics." This article is a piece of that thesis. She is still enthralled with medieval culture and is currently reading Middle English works in her free time. She lives in rural Mankato with her husband and her two sons.

Sherri Larson teaches English at St. Michael-Albertville High School. Her day is filled with 10th graders and elec-

tives for juniors and seniors, including Creative Writing, Poetry, Public Speaking, and Women's Issues. These classes give her an opportunity to stretch the creative ideas of writing and push students to do thoughtful and reflective work. Sometimes this is well received, and sometimes not. Either way, she finds teaching a challenging and rewarding honor. She participated in the Minnesota Writing Project in 2007, which has led to many other connections and opportunities. Honored to be chosen for the National Writing Project's 2008 Professional Writing Retreat, she spent four intense days of writing in the Santa Fe sun with other educators and editors. She currently serves on the governing board of the Minnesota Writing Project and is the secondary chair for the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English. Her paper on multigenre writing has developed from her Masters of Education studies with Saint Mary's University, where she presented some of the research at their annual conference.

Anne O'Meara has taught nineteen years at Minnesota State University, Mankato, where her duties have included training and supervising teaching assistants who teach Composition 101; co-chairing (with Bill Dyer) the Valley Writing Project, a faculty development project which helps college professors across the university integrate writing into their courses; and teaching courses in composition theory, composition, and American literature. She began her teaching career by teaching math and English at (Edina) Valley View Junior High. She then earned her Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota in the Twin Cities. She plays a brilliant brand of duplicate bridge, but, since she has recently taken up golf, has developed great sympathy for freshmen who feel like they are strangers on an alien planet where the path to success is completely unmarked.

Carl Nelson holds a B.A. in English from Gustavus Adolphus College and an M.A. in English literature from Minnesota State University, Mankato. His literary interests include a variety of mid-19th century American and Russian writers—particularly Thoreau and Tolstoy. He has been a site guide, curator, and exhibits designer with the Minnesota Historical Society

and the Nicollet County Historical Society for eight years. He enjoys fly fishing in his spare time.

Graham St. John Stott is associate professor of English at the Arab American University, Jenin (Palestine), where he teaches courses in British literature and TESOL methodology. He has also taught in Tunisia, and in the Gulf. This is his third article discussing *The Woman in White*, and he thinks a lot more remains to be said on what is a fascinating text. When not immersed in the 19th century novel, he is working on a book-length study of evangelical themes in the *Book of Mormon*.

Call for Papers for *MEJ*'s Next Issue

As we did at the end of the last issue, John Banschbach and I ***want to encourage all of you who are reading the Fall 2008 number of*** *MEJ* to consider yourselves part of our continuing dialogue with language, literature, reading, and composition—dialogue that engages and shares and enriches *your* pedagogy and research. And, to aid you in expressing and shaping *your* interests in and concerns about the materials you bring to the classroom, the students you bring them to, and your invention of strategies for engaging those students in those materials, we would like you to consider one of the topics listed below as your focus. Please understand that these topics are merely suggestions. Should your teaching context or circumstances cause you to identify a topic not on our brief list, we invite you to pursue it and send us the results. We want to read and interact with your work, whether that work has sprung from a teaching context in the elementary, middle, or high school, either public or private; community college; technical college; public university; or private college. As you peruse the list, do not hesitate to contact us for clarification on any of the topics or for advice about responding to an item we haven't listed that you would like to respond to. We welcome the opportunity to work with you. Please

think about **June 1, 2009** as a deadline, and think about the **2009 Spring MCTE Spring Conference** as avenue for presenting it.

Topics:

1. ***Young adult literature*** (multicultural, American, and/or British—traditionally structured or non-linear)
2. ***Teaching and representing Shakespeare*** for high school and college students
3. ***World literatures*** (Anglophone/commonwealth; African; Caribbean; Latin American; Chicano; Native American; Asian/American; East Indian)
4. ***Assessment*** at any level (we're not just thinking about rubrics that work, but the kinds of anonymous interventions that can be used to determine whether our students are learning what we intend for them to learn)
5. ***Literature of the Americas*** (any kind of literature to any number of audiences, related to Canada, the U.S., the Caribbean, and Mexico through Tierra del Fuego)
6. ***Un-banning the banned books*** (experiences and methodologies related to teaching them)
7. ***Assignment packages that work*** (i.e., prompts and materials situated around the development of an important assignment tied to a particular course and an audience for that course; a "tool box" of materials and rubrics and writing assists and prompts and strategies that will assist members of that audience with their struggle to complete successfully that assignment; and an assessment strategy that will enable some effective testing of whether the goals and objectives connected to the assignment have been reached—this is for teachers at any level)
8. ***Writing across the curriculum***, issues and strategies
9. ***Writing-intensive courses*** (definitions, challenges, approaches)

10. Electronic distance learning (dealing with audience problems, delivery issues)
11. The "capstone" experience, from portfolio to research paper (problems of mentoring and assessing are connected here)
12. Teaching the world: Humanities at any teaching level
13. Collaborative learning: assignments and teaching strategies that work
14. Technology in the English/language arts classroom
15. The relevance of the Western Canon (expanding/re-envisioning the canon)
16. Standardized testing and its impact on English/language arts curriculum
17. The world wide web and research paper writing
18. Poetry and its relevance
19. English language learners: how can we best serve their needs in the reading and composition classroom
20. Grammar and its place in today's English classes
21. Feedback on student writing and issues pertaining to responding
22. Practices in the teaching of English language arts
23. Research in and out of the classroom
24. "Audience" related issues
25. Teaching tips
26. Issues of diversity (representing race and gender)

We are hoping very much, depending upon the nature of your responses to these and other issues important to you, to incorporate two new areas into the journal: a "letters to the editor" section that either responds to essays represented in the pages of this issue or at the spring MCTE conference in Roch-

ester or to other issues of importance to you related to teaching literature, language arts, reading, and composition; and a section devoted to short and practical strategies of teaching in these areas (assignments; assessment pieces; collaborative techniques for engaging students in literature or the evaluation of their own writing; means for assisting students with their struggles to respond to your assignments or realize themselves as contributing members of your classroom environment; etc.). We look forward to hearing from you.

Don't wait for the Spring Conference to renew your membership!

MCTE membership runs from October to October of each year, so new and renewing members should send in the attached form and payment today. Don't miss a single issue of MCTE News!

Please make check or money order payable to MCTE. Print this page, fill out the form, and send both the completed form and payment in a stamped envelope to:

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