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From the Editors

This, our Fall 2004 edition, marks the first time that *The Minnesota English Journal* will appear on-line. An increasing number of professional journals—including some prestigious national scholarly journals—have decided to go on-line, and this issue of *MEJ* is our commitment to an engagement with that technology.

What will the use of that technology enable us to do? First of all, it allows us to produce a work that is instantly and universally usable. If you have access to a computer, a connection to the internet, and a functioning printer, you'll be able to read the *MEJ*, download a copy for yourself, and send your students to our site for information that you feel is timely and important for them and for your instruction of them. For us, it means that the material that we print electronically is instantly and infinitely editable. We believe that we produce a solid professional product. However, should we become aware of errors, or should we want to inform those who visit MCTE's web site that there are particular concerns we'd like you to engage with in one or more of our articles, an issue perhaps that we'd like you to carry on an electronic conversation about, or an emphasis concerning pedagogy that we'd like you to chip in alternative ways of thinking about, we can do it with the cooperation of our webmaster, Sandy Hayes. In other words, an important change here is that *MEJ* has become a living organism, with no time lag between the time we

print it and the time you receive it, with the capacity to breathe interactively with its readers. We love that prospect and challenge.

But, perhaps the most significant benefit that will accrue from publishing the journal on-line is that we will reach a much larger audience. Concurrent with the enlivening of our *MEJ* site on the MCTE web page, we have sent a letter to all schools—public and private; elementary, middle, and high school; technical and community college; members of the state university system—to inform language arts and English departments of our decision, to transmit to them the precise location of *MEJ*, and to encourage teachers and students alike to interact with it and with us. We hope the result of this invitation will be a wider circulation of the materials that we're publishing and encouragement to those that may use those materials not just to join conversations with us on our website but also to submit their ideas, teaching strategies, attempts to address problems related to their English and language arts curriculum, and successful applications of pedagogy, theory, praxis, and research in order to share them with a considerably larger audience.

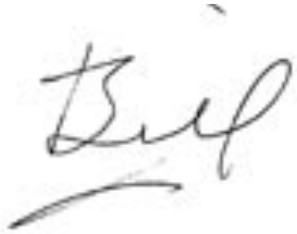
For a number of years, MCTE has understood the importance of *MEJ* for our membership. But going on-line enunciates our commitment to the philosophy that what is developed in the classroom or in our research should be available to as many as we can reach, regardless of whether or not those readers are current members of MCTE. We most certainly hope that the greater availability of *MEJ* will bring in more members to our organization and swell the attendance and participation at our fall and spring conferences, and we believe that the higher quality and inclusiveness that will result from our going on-line will bring that to pass. But ideas about what, why, and how we teach, and how we actively involve and motivate our student audiences, are much too important to keep among a relatively small audience. The editors of *MEJ* understand that, the more teacher/scholars who read the journal and interact with it, the greater and more diverse the pool of submissions on timely subjects will be flowing towards us; such an eventuality can only enhance the quality of the journal and the role it

can play as a facilitator of the on-going discussion about language, composition, literature, and teaching among ourselves on the various levels of instruction in which it's practiced.

To demonstrate that we value the growth of those discussions of theory and praxis in our language arts, composition, and literature classrooms, the editors have determined to offer a prize for what we consider to be the best article submitted for each issue. The $250 prize, not a great amount indeed but symbolically significant in our view, will not be available to members of the MCTE board or the editorial staff of *MEJ*; those of us from the board whose work you see represented in this issue have written for the love of "the game" and because we believe we have something to say. The prize will be offered beginning with the next issue, and the winner's piece will be identified within its pages.

We hope you are as energized as we are about the changes in *MEJ*. We look forward to reading your responses and suggestions to what we hope will continue to be a changing and constantly improving enterprise.

Respectfully,



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The Best of Intentions: considerations for utilizing anti-racist principles when teaching *To Kill A Mockingbird* in a predominantly white, northern high school

Heather Megarry

When I was a new teacher, I got a voice mail message from a parent that made me nervous. Mrs. Stafford, the mother of one of the few African-American students in my ninth- grade class, called because she noticed on my syllabus that we were about to start reading *To Kill A Mockingbird* and she said she'd like me to call her back because she had "some concerns" she wanted to discuss. "Here it comes," I thought, steeling myself for what could be the beginning of a drawn-out debate over book selection and racism in *To Kill A Mockingbird*. "I'm going to have to defend this book, and if I don't handle this right, I'm going to end up in front of the school board." With great trepidation, I returned Mrs. Stafford's call…

Harper Lee's classic Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird*, is one of the most widely read pieces of literature in American schools, and one of the most enthusiastically taught. The brilliance of the first person narrator, the vivid characterizations, clear symbolism and timeless themes make it an English teacher favorite. In fact, when I interviewed four other English teachers who, like myself, teach in northern, predominantly white high schools, each one reported that he or she looked forward to teaching *Mockingbird* each year and thought it was one of the books his or her students enjoyed and learned the most from. However, there have been cases where the book has been suc-

cessfully challenged by groups and individuals who object to the racist language in the text and feel that the book "undermin[es] race relations." The list of communities where *Mockingbird* has been challenged includes Eden Valley, Minnesota, Vernon-Verona-Sherill, New York, Warren, Indiana, Waukegan, Illinois, Kansas City, Missouri, and Park Hill (Missouri) Junior High School. In 1985, black parents in Casa Grande, Arizona, enlisted the help of the NAACP in their protest of the novel (American Booksellers Foundation for Free Expression). How can we reconcile the fact that the white school system—which prides itself on inclusion and being anti-racist—and its equally well-intentioned and liberal-minded teachers adore this book, knowing full well that some members of oppressed communities see it as offensive?

There seem to be two common responses to this paradox. We might either claim that *the book just is not racist*, or we might claim that *the way we teach it is not racist*.

Those of us in the first category point to the book's literary merit and its theme (that people need to be judged according to their individual actions rather than by their relatives or their skin color) to support our argument. Anyone who understands the book, we claim, can see that it isn't racist; in fact, it's anti-racist. "The book really isn't about race," one of the teachers I spoke to said. "It's about people and how we're all human." The problem with this stance is that it negates the perspective of people of color who find the book offensive. It's as if we are saying, "This book is not offensive because I say it isn't" or "If you are going to be offended by this, you don't understand the book" or, probably the most common defense, "Don't you understand history? That's the way it was back then." These attitudes, even if they are not said out loud, reveal the omnipresent power structures that exist in education. The teacher (or the curriculum committee, or whomever) is the authority and the student's (or parent's) belief system is wrong and needs to conform to that authority. When a parent or student honestly says, "that offends me," but we as the school or teacher only respond with, "Well, it shouldn't," we are claiming not just a different, but a *superior* world view. We tend to discount other people's

viewpoints because they aren't the same as our own. This is a natural human reaction, of course, but as white teachers (and therefore doubly categorized in the power structures of American society) we also have to recognize it as an arrogant one.

The teachers who fall into the second category are willing to recognize that there are parts of the book that might make some readers uncomfortable, but they claim that these parts shouldn't override the value of the rest of the book. Certainly, many of us feel awkward about handling the word "n[redacted]r" with our students and we can't deny, if we really think about it, that the black community in the book is poor and disenfranchised, and that the only character in it who is completely destroyed by his "Otherness" is the disabled black man, Tom Robinson. So, out of our discomfort, we tend to downplay the role of racial power structures in the book in favor of discussing "universal" themes of tolerance. The problem with this mindset, however, is that instead of moving race to the foreground and discussing it openly, it shies away from conflict and, in my opinion, means that we are not really teaching the entire book. Christine Sleeter advocates that all teachers should teach a multicultural education for all students. She defines multicultural education as one that "advocates transformation of the entire process of education with the goal of elimination of oppression of one group of people by another" (quoted in Corrick 3). For all of us who have ever admonished students for wanting "just the movie version" of classic pieces of literature, I believe we are only providing them with the "movie version" of *Mockingbird* when we fail to forefront racial inequities and the power structures that cause them.

The Tension of Race in America

At the root of our reluctance to teach *To Kill A Mockingbird* as a book about race is both our reluctance to see our society as one based on race and racial oppression (a particular characteristic for white teachers in predominantly white high schools) and our general discomfort with how to talk about racial issues "without offending anyone." Because of our discomfort with how to talk about race, we decide maybe it's best not to try.

In fact, two of the four teachers I spoke with gave examples of times they had made curricular decisions based on apprehension about causing racial tension in their classroom. One had been teaching in a small town with only one black family. Although she had always taught *To Kill A Mockingbird* before, based on her knowledge that the black student had a history of being picked on by other students and that his mother had taken a "very political stance" with the school on issues of race before, the teacher decided to substitute *Great Expectations* for *Mockingbird* the year the black student was in her class. The other teacher I spoke with had never had problems with *Mockingbird*, but she said that she had tried to teach *The Power of One* one time and it "nearly caused a riot" between some of her students. She hasn't taught it since. "I won't go through the aggravation again," she said. In the school district where I work, there was a particularly inflammatory set of public hearings about Gordon Parks' *The Learning Tree* during my first year. Although one of my colleagues defended the book eloquently and successfully, she has asked not to teach that class again. Not one of these teachers is any more or less 'racist' than either of the others. All of their stories, though, point to the fact that dealing with race in classrooms can be stressful, messy and disheartening work.

Teachers should not feel inadequate, or be made to feel inadequate, because they feel uncomfortable discussing race in their classrooms. It is not an individual flaw; it is a societal one. There is plenty of noise in the American meta-dialogue about race, but it is difficult to sort through which voices are productive and which ones are reductive. There are no clear rules about how to "best" talk about race in America. One need only to look at the public conversations generated by such diverse issues that have been in the headlines in recent years, such as the removal of the Confederate flag from the South Carolina state house, the elevated scrutiny of Chinese Americans in government offices, racial profiling by law enforcement, or even the question of Tiger Woods' ethnic identity, to see that talking about race in America is sometimes enlightening, sometimes divisive and sometimes both—or neither—according to whom is listening.

Teaching *To Kill A Mockingbird* with Anti-Racist Principles

After problemetizing the teaching of *To Kill A Mockingbird* as I have, I need to clarify that I believe it is a worthy book, and I intend to keep teaching it myself. I don't think the book should be removed from school curricula, but I do think that teachers—particularly teachers in predominantly white, northern, suburban schools—need to re-think some of our approaches to the book so that we consciously apply anti-racist principles in our classrooms. I submit that we need to: 1) begin looking at the text in terms of race. This means that we will need to examine whiteness as well as blackness and ask our students to try to define what it means to be white. We also need to 2) consciously avoid essentializing race ourselves, and point out where the novel might commit this fallacy. We need to 3) focus attention on the evidence of institutional racism, not just individual acts of racism in the book, and 4) challenge the notion that racism happened "back in the day" or "down South", but doesn't affect "us."

Some teachers tell me that they don't see the book as being particularly about race. These teachers emphasize Atticus' admonition to Scout that "you never really understand a person…until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (34) and see the book as being about the universal human challenge to develop empathy for others.

I have a couple of problems with this approach to the book. First, it is part of the fallacy of the color-blind society. Race does matter, in the novel and in our society, and it is a common desire, particularly on the part of white people (which, unfortunately, most teachers still are) to deny the power of racial difference in our country. A person of color does not have the luxury of "ignoring" race. One of the reasons why racism continues in our country is because the privileged white person is allowed to (as Countee Cullen wrote) "live in a tent of sun and shadow/ all his little own." Racism will not stop if the only children who discuss it are children of color. Anti-racist ideologies should not be reserved only for multiethnic classrooms.

There is a common fallacy that being white equates with being human. Leslie G. Roman argues that this can "imply that

whites are *colorless*, and hence without racial subjectivities, interest, and privileges." "Still worse," she writes, "it can convey the idea that whites are free of the responsibility to challenge racism" (71). One way to avoid this problem when teaching *To Kill A Mockingbird* is to consciously challenge students to define what it means to be white. We need to treat whiteness as merely one of many racial categories. White cannot be equated as being "regular," implying that only people who aren't white have "race." *To Kill A Mockingbird*, I think, gives us a perfect way to do this. We can start by having students define what it means to be "Finch," "Cunningham" and "Ewell" when we reach the end of chapter three. For example, students should be able to identify the attitudes toward appearance, education, the law and work for each of these families. As the novel progresses, and students see the black Robinson family as being quite similar in many ways to the Cunninghams, but considered socially below the Ewells, we need to start examining what it means to be white in Maycomb and what it means to be black in Maycomb. It would then seem to be a good time to think about what it means to be white in America in the 2000's and what it means to be black in America today. Special care should be taken to question the students if they "see" diversity within the white community, but only have one image of the black community in America today.

Also, I think pretending that race is a secondary issue in the novel shortchanges the text of *To Kill A Mockingbird*. Some might argue that the story of Tom Robinson and his trial doesn't start until Chapter 9, and the trial is over with eight chapters left to go in the book. However, I prefer to see the trial, not as one of many storylines in the novel, but as literally and figuratively the heart of the book. I think it is also easy to slip into treating Calpurnia, Zeebo, Helen Robinson, Reverend Sykes and the rest of the black community in Maycomb as secondary characters, as "lesser." But just because poor, working blacks were treated as "lesser" and "other" historically and in the fictional world of Maycomb does not mean that we as teachers are required to do the same when we teach the book. An anti-racist reading of the novel must include a conscious at-

tention to examining Maycomb's black community members.

One of the political criticisms I have about the novel (and I don't have a lot of them) is that Lee's portrayal of the black community is less varied and subtle than her portrayal of the white community. For the most part, the black characters in *Mockingbird* are noble, hard working and kind, and therefore of little threat to the segregated society of Maycomb or to the white suburban reader. However, there is an important exception that I think teachers would be remiss to gloss over. In Chapter Twelve, Scout and Jem go to church with Calpurnia and they run across Lula, the only black character with any "character flaws" whatsoever. We know Lula is "bad" because she behaves "rudely" by pointing at the children and professing a preference for racial segregation. We, like Scout, are surprised when Calpurnia herself uses the word "n[redacted]r" when she talks to Lula. We don't "like" Lula because she increases the scene's tension and she immediately expresses distrust of Scout and Jem, even though we know that she has never met them personally. Dramatically, she also serves as a foil for the goodness and gentility of the rest of the First Purchase A.M.E Church. When Zeebo denounces Lula, saying, "she's a troublemaker from way back, got fancy ideas an' haughty ways," we feel not only Scout and Jem's relief, but also their growing attachment to the 'good' parishioners who protect them from harm (122).

The traditional approach teachers take to Lula is perhaps most clearly illustrated by looking at a published curriculum unit for the novel. In the curriculum unit's study guide, the only question about Lula is, "How do you explain Lula's antagonism toward Jem and Scout?" (Morgan and Mote 11). I agree that we need to discuss why Lula reacts the way she does; however, I do not agree with the answer provided by the curriculum guide. The "correct" answer in the teacher's suggested response section is, "Lula represents the kind of Negro who 'knows her place' and keeps it. She probably resented the close relationship Calpurnia had with the Finch children" (4). This answer suggests that Lula feels Calpurnia is "showing off" the fact that she is close to white people. I believe we need to challenge students not only to empa-

thize with Scout and Jem, who are the victims of racial prejudice for the first time in their lives, but also to examine with some sensitivity why Lula sees them as a threat. Why is she willing to go against the grain of her community? I think if we put ourselves inside Lula's skin for a while, we might see that the complaints the church members have about her are similar to the accusations lobbed at Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, and many other civil rights activists. What might a thoughtful rewriting of this scene from Lula's point of view include, if we looked at her, not as someone who thought Calpurnia was getting above herself, but as someone who felt Calpurnia was allowing herself to be exploited?

It might be a perfect point to discuss the fallacy of the idea of "reverse racism" (which many students conclude that Lula's actions are). Several educators use the definition of racism as "rac ism=prejudice+power." If we subscribe to this definition, Lula's actions, while originating from prejudice, do not wield power. We can't ignore the fact that Scout and Jem, despite being only children, have access to power that a black person would not have if the tables were reversed. There is no such thing as "reverse racism."

The more advanced student might also question the author's description of Lula as "bullet-headed with strange almond-shaped eyes, straight nose, and an Indian-bow mouth" (121). What, precisely, is the implication when Lula is described as having multiethnic physical characteristics and is also seen as a villain of sorts?

My point here is to encourage teachers to balance out what otherwise might be a shortcoming of the novel, and to propose that, even with a book we have read as many times as most of us have read *To Kill A Mockingbird*, there might still be some parts of it that we haven't fully explored before.

It is also important to highlight the examples of institutional racism in the book, rather than only seeing racism as a series of individual choices. If we do this well, we are helping students to build the analytical tools they will need to see how racism is institutionalized in our society today. One way to do this is to look at how the novel invites us to examine racism in the American justice system. Tom Robinson is found

guilty of a crime that he clearly did not commit because he was a black man who "made the mistake" of expressing pity for the white man who accused him of the crime. Jem's complete disillusionment stands in contrast to Atticus' more tempered reaction, which is, "I don't know [how the jury could do it], but they did it. They've done it before and they did it tonight and they'll do it again and when they do it—it seems that only children weep" (215). Furthermore, Tom is scheduled for execution, "unless the Governor commutes his sentence" (222). When Jem concludes that the problem is not in the laws, but in the jury system, Atticus points out that if eleven other boys like Jem had been on the jury, Tom would have been acquitted (223). Then he holds up the example of the Cunningham man who stalled the jury deliberations by arguing for Tom, as another illustration of how individual people can resist racism (225).

This is a very palatable way to teach about racism. But I think we should extend the lesson to an examination of who was not on the jury (women, blacks and townspeople) by questioning possible explanations for their exclusion, *other* than those Atticus provides. We should also speculate whether or not the governor would be likely to commute Tom's sentence. When Tom is killed trying to escape prison, we should invite students to see his choice as a reaction to the larger systems at play in his society, rather than an individual act of madness (238). As Barbara Dodds Stanford writes in *Teaching Black Literature*, "Atticus, in fact, compromised and survived in a destructive social system, and … for the blacks in the novel, Atticus' 'heroism' was a paternalistic insult. In a just system, Tom Robinson would never have needed defending—and Atticus would not have been a hero" (10). Furthermore, although in the past I have always been satisfied when students were able to explain how both Tom Robinson and Boo Radley serve as symbolic "mockingbirds," I will now be sure to help them understand the importance in the differences between their situations. Boo killed a human being and will not be expected to "pay the price" for it; but Tom did no crime, and was sentenced to death. Can we point to any explanation other than that Boo is white, Tom is

black and the justice system is racist? I think not. We must pay attention to the fact that Atticus, a representative of the judicial system, and Heck Tate, a representative of law enforcement, conspire and (we assume) successfully shield a white murderer from all consequences, but they are incapable of protecting an innocent black man from wrongful conviction and execution.

Another consideration for teachers when approaching this book is to avoid dealing with racism as if it were some kind of historical artifact, a problem that used to happen but doesn't anymore. The idea that racism and segregation *used* to be bad, or only *other* people (people of color or southerners) have problems with racism, is easy to slip into in the privileged white northern suburbs during a time of economic prosperity. The novel takes place in all of the "other" categories — a small town, racially segregated south of the Depression. If the *To Kill A Mockingbird* lesson plans available on the Internet are any indication, most teachers spend at least some time with their students providing historical context to the novel. Some plans call for showing parts of *Eyes on the Prize*. Others have students conduct mini-research activities about the 1930's or about black history. One site from Lewis and Clark University has an extensive "web quest" activity for students studying the south in the first half of the 20th century (Cline; Lauderman; Kraus). These activities are fine, especially as they serve as an interdisciplinary connection with history. However, I am more concerned about the fact that few of the prepared lesson plans and unit plans provide teachers with ideas and resources for how to connect the novel with the racism and segregation that exists in our country today. How should we go about examining with our students the racial injustices in our school systems and in our justice system today? When our President oversaw the greatest number of executions ever conducted in American history in one year (as governor of Texas), how should we help students to cast a critical eye on the percentages of people of color who are incarcerated and executed in this country? This is an area where curricular development and support materials are still needed.

If we fail to examine *both* the institutional racism in *To*

Kill A Mockingbird and the institutional racism that exists in our country and our communities today, are we any different from the ladies' Missionary Society in Chapter 24 whose "eyes always filled with tears when [they] considered the oppressed [Mrunas in Africa]," but who also condemn Helen Robinson and the black domestic workers for being "sulky" after Tom's trial? (233-4). Could Harper Lee be indicting anyone other than ourselves when she writes of Mrs. Gates, Scout's teacher who dramatically teaches a lesson on "DEMOCRACY" in opposition to Hitler in Germany, and states, "'Over here we don't believe in persecuting anybody. Persecution comes from people who are prejudiced. Pre-ju-dice" (248)? If during the teaching of this novel, we fail to discuss the evidence of institutional racism that exists in our society today, we are living proof of Lee's contempt for the hypocrisy of formal education and its inability to be relevant to the world in which the students live.

Recognizing Race within Our Own Classrooms

Not only do we as white teachers of white students often fail to recognize "whiteness" as a racial category, but we also often fail to acknowledge that we also teach students of color. In his study of school integration, R.C. Rist reported that white teachers tend to state that they don't notice their students' racial identities (Sleeter 161). As one teacher put it, "I really don't see this color until we start talking about it, you know. I see children as having differences, maybe they can't … do this or they can't do that, I don't see the color until we start talking multicultural. Then, oh yes, that's right, he's this and she's that" (quoted in Sleeter 161). Education professor Christine Sleeter problematizes these teachers' claims. She believes that, as teachers, our 'color-blindness' is in fact a coping mechanism. The fact that we claim not to notice what is physically obvious, she says, reveals our struggle to rectify the negative stereotypes we (as products of a racist society) have about people of color, with our desire to like and respect each of our students. She writes, "Therefore, in an effort not to be racist themselves and to treat all children equally, many white teachers try to suppress what

they understand about people of color, which leads them to try not to 'see' color [in their students]" (162). This is an uncomfortable idea to hear because most of us felt that, even if we weren't very skilled at incorporating race issues into our classrooms, at least we were doing the "right" thing by making sure we didn't think of or treat our students of color differently from our white students. Sleeter says that even by doing this, we reveal that we have internalized negative stereotypes of people of color and reveal ourselves as products of a racist society.

If we allow ourselves to see Sleeter's point, I think a good number of us would be tempted to give up on trying to change our classrooms at all. "No matter what I do," we argue, "it's going to be 'wrong' to someone, so why should I change what's been working for me?" I think there is a great need for the "experts" in multicultural education to address this. How are we as teachers supposed to respond to students of color in our classrooms? On one hand, we don't want to treat them differently from our white students, but on the other hand, we aren't supposed to treat them like they *are* white students, either.

Certainly, there isn't an easy solution to this conundrum. But, rather than just pointing out the problem, we need to propose some concrete schemes for teachers to use to try to solve it. I have one: I believe that at some point during the *To Kill A Mockingbird* unit, the teacher should find the time, either before or after class, and privately, to initiate a conversation with the student of color about the novel.

But I acknowledge that this might not be the easiest or the best thing to do. "I have one black student out of the eighty-nine freshmen in my classes this semester," reports one teacher I spoke with. "I don't know what he's getting out of [*To Kill A Mockingbird]*, but it doesn't seem to bother him. He never says anything." When asked if he would ever approach the student in an attempt to open the lines of communication, the teacher voiced the feelings of most of us when he asked, "How should I approach him? I don't want to single him out, as if to say, 'Hey, since you're the only black kid here, what do you think about the book?'"

Like most teachers, this man knew that turning a spot-

light onto students of color is not a good idea, especially if it is interpreted as a desire to have the student to "speak for his or her race" (since this assumes that racial identities are fixed categories with essential natures). Furthermore, as teachers of adolescents, we are extremely sensitive to the pressures on all of our students to "fit in." Just as Scout's empathy for 'outsiders' and victims of prejudice grows as Jem and Dill exclude her from games on the basis of her gender, we as teachers use our own experiences as 'outsiders' to empathize with our students' sensitivities. Because we didn't want to be singled out as teenagers, we know that any individual attention we give a student could be embarrassing to him or her, so we try to avoid it. However, again, we often slip into assuming that the white experience is the 'universal' experience when we fail to acknowledge that our students of color have an added experience that is not the same as our own. W.E.B. DuBois called this the "double consciousness" of the African-American. He argued, back in 1900, that to be black in America required not only an understanding of blackness, but also a keen understanding of whiteness. Maybe (and this is an intentional equivocation) black students in predominantly white high schools wouldn't find being 'singled out' (again, not in front of a group of classmates, but in private) such a shocking experience. Certainly there is no perfect guideline for the "best" way to handle *Mockingbird* with an isolated black student. However, it seems like erring on the side of at least acknowledging, personally and privately, that the student of color might have a unique perspective on this racially complex novel is better than pretending that we are completely 'colorblind.'

We need to consider that the adolescent student of color, particularly in a white high school, is much more keenly aware of his/her position as 'other' than we might be comfortable recognizing. This is not to say that all students of color will have the same reaction to the book. Where one student might not want to discuss race at all, another might be very articulate about his or her perspective. Where one student might have a very personal response, another might not if he or she feels very removed from the African-American characters in

the book. I once had a black student who told me (in another conversation, not in relation to *Mockingbird*) that she was often frustrated when she felt people expected her to "relate" to the African American history of slavery or segregation. Her family immigrated to the United States from Africa within the last two generations and she felt her connection to these events was tangential. Christine Sleeter's research also points out that many African American students have so internalized "the celebration of Europe and the silence about Africa that the school curriculum maintains, or …the media's depiction of Europe as industrialized and 'developed' and Africa as 'underdeveloped' and 'primitive' that they deny any connection with their African heritage" (166). But whether or not the student wants to engage in further conversation, I think the important thing is for us to ask. I feel we should proactively 1) offer the student of color the invitation to express his or her response to the novel and 2) allow the student to respond *on his or her own terms* if he or she accepts the invitation. Although it might feel awkward for both teacher and student to start this conversation, and although we may not see that our attempt has had any effect whatsoever, we cannot let this deter us from trying to reverse the teacher-student, white-black power structure in our classrooms. All revolutionary actions are awkward, and most of them also appear futile.

When I overcame my nervousness about returning Mrs. Stafford's phone call (and successfully resisted the urge to pretend I never got her message), I ended up engaging in a very helpful and frank discussion about race. To my relief, Mrs. Stafford told me that she was very familiar with *Mockingbird* and she thought its message about human dignity was a worthy one and a good topic for discussion in school. She was not interested in pulling her child from my class or in having him read an alternate text. However, she said she did have one request: could I refrain from saying "n[redacted]r" out loud in class? She said that when her older daughter had been in ninth grade and parts of the book were read aloud, she had felt very uncomfortable hearing that word spoken in that setting.

My assumptions and fears about this phone call, based

almost entirely upon my own racial prejudices, were unfounded. Of course, I readily agreed to the mother's request and thanked her for calling me and talking to me about it. I appreciated that she didn't expect me to know and to anticipate what it would be like to be an African-American student reading this book in school. I appreciated that she gave me a concrete and "do-able" action plan to help me on my path toward making my classroom a less hostile place for at least one student of color. I don't assume that all African-American parents or students have the same "position" on the use of the 'n-word,' and I am not sure that the "see but don't speak" idea is always the best way of handling racial pejoratives in school, but I certainly appreciate the help Mrs. Stafford gave me to walk around in her son's skin for a little while.

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They're Here, They're Queer, Get Used to It:
The Rise of Gay Characters in Young Adult Literature

Amanda M. MacGregor

The past few years have seen an enormous increase in the visibility of gays and lesbians. Say what you will about television, but it deserves most of the credit for this visibility. Each week, countless people turn on their televisions to laugh with *Will and Grace* or to marvel at the style-savvy gurus on *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*. *The L-Word* centers on lesbian relationships, *It's All Relative* tells the story of a gay couple in Boston learning to understand and be understood by their new in-laws, and many shows have gay secondary characters. In fact, it now almost seems obligatory for a show to have a gay character or at least one episode with a gay plot line. Gay marriage is the hot button issue on the news these days. Turning off the television and opening a book reveals that many contemporary authors are following the trend television established and are starting to include more gay characters in their books. Potentially the most groundbreaking place these characters are showing up is in young adult literature.

In its 50-odd-year history young adult, or YA, literature hasn't been very welcoming to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) characters. Or, when it was welcoming, it wasn't particularly kind. If a character came out, that character would meet an unhappy ending. While discussing the emergence of YA books with gay characters, Michael Cart notes, "[They] seemed to decree that if you were gay, all you could

look forward to was a life of despair or an untimely death, though usually in a car crash instead of by suicide" (198).

Homosexuality's first appearance in YA literature is in John Donovan's 1969 *I'll Get There: It Better be Worth the Trip*. Though homosexuality is certainly not the focus of the book and is only vaguely dealt with, it nonetheless remains a significant milestone. In her examination of YA novels published from 1969 to 1997 with LGBT characters, noted scholar Christine Jenkins cites 31 titles from 1969 to 1984, 30 titles from 1985 to 1992, and 38 titles from 1993 to 1997 (301). A phenomenal amount of novels now feature LGBT characters. Instead of only alluding to homosexuality or serving as predictable "lessons," recent YA novels have more positive approaches. No longer fixated solely on the (usually) painful process of coming to terms with their sexuality, many of the recent titles show LGBT characters who have already come to terms, happily. Story lines move beyond that one single subject and embrace a variety of perspectives and plots.

The explosion of gay-friendly novels is important. Certainly LGBT young adults will breathe a sigh of relief to see themselves reflected in YA novels. Parents, teachers, librarians, and anyone else working with young adults should take an interest, too. It's no secret that LGBT teens have more difficult lives than their straight peers do. One of the most serious differences is that LGBT teenagers are more likely to commit suicide: "They are two to six times more likely than other teens to attempt suicide and they account for 30 percent of all completed suicides among young adults even though they constitute only 10 percent of the teenage population" (A.T. Cook qtd. in Vare and Norton 329). With an estimated one out of ten people homosexual, every high school is surely home to numerous LGBT-identified youth. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) states that "more than 4 out of 5 lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender students report being verbally, sexually, or physically harassed at school because of their sexual orientation" (glsen.org). Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) reports "the average high school student hears 25 anti-gay slurs daily; 97 percent of high school students regularly hear homo-

phobic remarks" (pflag.org). Much of this homophobia can be attributed to ignorance. The visible presence of LGBT teenagers in books may help educate people unfamiliar with these experiences. Knowledge of what novels have LGBT protagonists will help parents, teachers, librarians, and teens themselves find the resources they or someone they know may desperately need. While great strides have been made to ensure that a high school curriculum is more inclusive of racial and cultural minorities, LGBT people are often still left behind. Barbara Smith says, "Homophobia is usually the last oppression to be mentioned, the last to be taken seriously, the last to go. But it is extremely serious, sometimes to the point of being fatal" (qtd. in Swartz 11).

The explosion of LGBT-friendly literature is generating much attention from educators and critics alike. "Gay and Lesbian Teenagers: A Reading Ladder for Students," a 1993 article by Robert F. Williams in *The ALAN Review*, provides a wide range of material concerning LGBT teens and young adult literature. Williams includes statistics, lists of helpful organizations, and an annotated bibliography, and he points to many nonfiction books that focus on LGBT history. Carolyn Caywood examines the importance of the availability of LGBT books in libraries in her article "Reaching out to Gay Teens." She stresses that it is not enough to have the books in the library. Librarians need to familiarize themselves with the content of LGBT books or, "if a librarian is not careful with recommendations, teen readers can wind up with an unrelieved diet of tragedy" (50). For Caywood, these books are not just helpful, but vital: "Library materials that offer support to gay and lesbian teens can save lives" (50).

In "Understanding Gay and Lesbian Youth: Sticks, Stones, and Silence," Jonatha W. Vare and Terry L. Norton explore "the developmental difficulties that gay and lesbian teens encounter and behaviors that place them at risk" (327). This well-researched and succinct article helps educators better understand what LGBT teens are up against. The article calls LGBT youth "the most alienated, rejected, and isolated youth in American schools" (328). While the focus is on statistics and developmental issues, the authors also provide an

overview of young adult literature every educator should know.

These articles help provide a good base for understanding LGBT youth and all point to the significant role YA literature plays in the lives of these teenagers. The following close examination of some recent YA novels will help illustrate the many ways LGBT youths' stories are being told.

Brent Hartinger's *Geography Club* (2003) tells the story of a group of high school students who start a gay-lesbian-bisexual support group under the guise of being a club for geography enthusiasts. Hartinger's compelling dialogue and the universal setting of the hallowed/horrored halls of high school combine to create a realistic, insightful story. Russell, the main character, finds that the only place he can explore his homosexuality is in the anonymity of gay chat rooms. Here he meets a boy whose online name is GayTeen. When they meet up in real life, Russell is surprised to discover that GayTeen is actually Kevin, the star baseball jock from Russell's high school. While their relationship grows, they struggle to keep it hidden away, but manage to befriend other students in similar situations. Before the geography club's formation, Russell says, "I may not have been completely alone in life, but I was definitely lonely. My secret mission—four years in an American high school—had been an involuntary one, and now I desperately wanted to be somewhere where I could be honest about who I was and what I wanted" (11). Thanks to the club, Russell's life becomes a little more honest and much less lonely. *Geography Club* received seventeen rejections before being picked up by HarperCollins Publishers. "Editors told my agent again and again that there was no market for a book like this," says Hartinger (AfterEllen.com). The article goes on to say "sales [of *Geography Club*] were so strong the book is now in its third printing and a sequel is already in the works."

Empress of the World (2001) by Sara Ryan takes place at a summer program for gifted teenagers. Fifteen-year-old Nicola, who up until now assumes she is straight, surprises herself and falls for the beautiful Battle Hall Davies, a girl. Ryan's book is noteworthy not because of the writing or the plot, but because of Nicola's acceptance of her changing sexuality. The

judgment and scrutiny of their classmates bother Battle and Nic at first, but they are able to overcome this and focus on how *they* feel about being gay. Like *Geography Club*, *Empress of the World* deals with various aspects of homosexuality in a realistic, hopeful manner. Unlike so many of their predecessors, none of Hartinger's or Ryan's characters meets unhappy endings.

Ryan depicts a wide range of responses to the girls' relationship. Before officially "out" and before either girl acts on her feelings, their friend Isaac tells Nic his aunt is a lesbian. This prompts Nic to tell him that she thinks she is, too. Isaac hardly blinks at this. He says, "Remember, I'm from San Francisco. I assume everyone I meet is a bisexual pagan until proven otherwise" (102). This attitude is refreshing to see in YA literature. Today, teenagers often aren't surprised to learn a friend is gay. It's a non-issue; being gay is just another facet of who they are, but not need for shock or surprise. While people like Isaac accept Nic's coming out, others are not so open-minded. Nicola writes in her journal, "I've started to keep track of the number of times I hear someone mutter the word 'dyke' in my direction—five so far" (115).

Like with every romance, Battle and Nic hit some rough patches. They break up, Battle briefly dates a boy, and Nic is heartbroken. But the book ends on a happy note, with the girls reunited, though about to leave their summer school. Ryan's message to her readers shows that sexuality is something that can be person-specific and ever changing. Sometimes things are not just as clear as gay or straight. Nic comes a long way in the story. She begins her summer school experience bent on obsessively analyzing every detail of life, consumed with the need to compartmentalize and label everything. She leaves willing to just let things be, content to not put a name on her sexuality but instead just see where it takes her.

Perhaps the most LGBT-positive YA title to appear is David Levithan's *Boy Meets Boy* (2003). Set in an optimistically progressive high school, Levithan's unique characters break new ground. The protagonist, Paul, notes, "There isn't really a gay scene or a straight scene in our town. They all got mixed up a while back, which I think is for the best. . . . Most of the straight

guys try to sneak into the Queer Beer Bar. Boys who love boys flirt with girls who love girls" (1). Paul doesn't have to come to terms with being gay; he just *is*. He says, "I've always known I was gay, but it wasn't confirmed until I was in kindergarten. It was my teacher who said so. It was right there on my kindergarten report card: PAUL IS DEFINITELY GAY AND HAS A VERY GOOD SENSE OF SELF" (8). Paul is neither lonely nor alone. Multiple love interests make Paul's life more complex, not to mention the colorful friends in his life. It's safe to say YA literature has never seen a character like Infinite Darlene (once Daryl), the star quarterback and school's most popular drag queen. In 1994, author Nancy Garden said, "Until we get to the point where gay characters just *are*, we won't be where we need to be" (qtd. in Cart 231). Levithan goes to great lengths to show LGBT characters just *being*. In her interview with Levithan on Salon.com, Sarah Wildman observes that Levithan creates "a queer main character who isn't worried about being kicked out of his house, beat up at school, or ostracized from his family. He isn't coming out. He barely knows where his closet is." Surrounded by loving and supportive friends and parents, this love story presents a fun and appealing reality so far from our own that is certain to generate productive, educational discussions.

Alex Sanchez's *Rainbow Boys* (2002) is told through the eyes of Nelson, who is openly gay, Kyle, who is trying to come out, and Jason, a jock having a hard time accepting his sexuality. The boys take turns narrating chapters, providing an expansive view of what it means to be a gay teenager. Nelson's unhidden, unashamed homosexuality makes him an easy target for his narrow-minded classmates. He is repeatedly called a "faggot" and gets physically attacked more than once for being gay. Sanchez isn't afraid to examine sensitive issues. Nelson has unprotected sex with a man he meets in an Internet chat room. Readers see Nelson worry about the possibility of contracting HIV and regret not having asked his lover to wear a condom. Nelson's mother is a wonderful character. One hundred percent accepting of her son and an activist for many gay causes, she is a unique parent in YA literature. This sort of supportive

and open relationship sets a good example for readers to keep in mind and helps Kyle along in his quest to come out. Sanchez writes, "Nelson seemed to know *everything* about being gay. He told Kyle about Alexander the Great, Oscar Wilde, and Michelangelo. He explained the Stonewall Riots and defined words like *cruising* and *drag*. . . . The most amazing thing was how Nelson talked about all this in front of his own mom" (14). Nelson's relationship with his mother shows the positive effects of an accepting and loving response to having a gay child.

Kyle has no problem accepting his attraction to guys, but does have a problem with how to tell his parents. When he does come out, his mom does her best to understand him, though she admits she is scared and sad. Kyle's father blames Nelson and struggles to be okay with Kyle's sexuality. At school Kyle must face further judgement. His locker is defaced with the word "queer." He eventually adds "and proud" to this graffiti, showing that he accepts himself and won't hide from others.

Jason has the most issues to deal with. An ostensibly straight jock with a pretty girlfriend, Jason can't help but feel he might be gay. When he starts to have feelings for Kyle, any doubt is removed and he's forced to deal with the issue. His alcoholic father constantly hurls epithets like "queer" and "pansy" at Jason. Predictably, he refuses to accept that his son is gay. After being physically violent, his father moves out, disgusted with his son. Jason slowly starts to tell his friends that he is gay. By the story's end, he's still trying to deal with how he really feels about his sexuality. Sanchez masterfully illustrates the many feelings and issues involved in coming out. The end of the book provides important contact information for suicide prevention hotlines, the Human Rights Campaign, PFLAG, and many other LGBT resources.

One last novel to note is *Luna* by Julie Anne Peters. High school senior Liam has always known he is a girl trapped in a boy's body. His sister, Regan, is the only person who knows that her brother, Liam, is actually Luna, her sister. Only able to be herself at night, Luna spends hours trying on clothes and make-up for Regan, dreaming of what it would be like to be Luna full time. Over the course of the novel, Liam becomes

more and more unable and unwilling to suppress Luna. He starts to appear in public as Luna. His parents and peers are confused and disgusted. Desperately unhappy with having to continue his charade as a normal teenage boy, Liam decides to choose to be Luna for good. The book ends with Luna boarding a plane to Seattle, with plans to undergo sex-reassignment surgery. The thoughtful and moving depiction of life as a transsexual teenager is the first of its kind and one not to be missed.

The books discussed here show the gamut of feelings, thoughts, reactions, and issues surrounding LGBT teens. Today's characters are allowed a full range of possibilities. From Paul's early knowledge of being gay, to Nicola's eventual refusal to label her sexuality, to Liam's decision to transition to Luna, LGBT characters have come far in the 35 years since Donovan's book. The importance of the prevalence of these books can't be overestimated. Looking back to YA's history with homosexual characters, Levithan says, "Book-inclined kids, who read to find identity in part, weren't finding anything saying it's okay, it's cool to be gay, and [the story] can be happy. It should not be such a radical thing" (Wildman). Although it often doesn't seem like it, society continues to make progress in accepting and understanding LGBT people. Given the increasing rates of YA titles featuring gay characters, more teenagers than ever will be exposed to these stories and learn from them. Michael Cart writes, "Routinely including gay characters in YA books may ultimately have the same positive, cumulative effect that their increasing visibility on television promises" (236). The future can only bring an even larger increase in YA books with gay characters. They're here, they're queer, get used to it: these books are here to stay.

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Women Find Personal Power Through *Voice*

Jeanette Lukowski

I still remember the day that I first heard the word *voice* used in relation to written composition. It was a Wednesday night, in the Fall of 2001, and I was enrolled in my first semester of graduate studies. The course was called "The Teaching of College Writing," and roughly half of the eager faces which stared back at the instructor belonged to first-time Teaching Assistants—myself included. On this particular night, we had a guest-speaker: the former Director of Composition Studies.

The specific reason she came to speak to our class fades from my memory; the topic which moved to the foreground that evening, virtually gnawing its way into my very being, was *voice* in student writing. Our evening's guest professor was conducting a classroom exercise with us, an exercise she gives students in her "Writing with Style" course. We were each given two photographs of barns and instructed to describe these barns to the group. Were there categories we could group the barns under? What similarities and/or differences could we use to categorize them? She explained that our questions were really addressing issues of *style*.

While groping around in this dark abyss of borderline-knowledge, students tried to understand the word *style* through word-association techniques. "What about *tone*?" asked one. "How about *voice*?" asked another. The visiting professor then asked us, in turn, for definitions for *those*

words, and the seed was planted in my psyche forever to mark the precise moment when I learned that *style* and *voice* are two entirely separate entities. So what then is *voice*? My "destiny" as a composition teacher/researcher was revealed.

Voice meant so much more to me than either *style* or *tone* because for too many years I was a "voiceless" human being, accepting what came my way. Since I have always been extremely shy, I chose to let others speak for me if the situation warranted it. Remaining silent just seemed easier.

Getting married at a young age seemed to exacerbate the situation. Using the "old-fashioned" belief that the husband should be "in charge" as my guide, I willingly relinquished my *voice* to another yet again. Unfortunately, I had selected a mate who had an erratic and violent temper. Each year, the verbal put-downs got worse, the name-calling accelerated, my eyes learned to stay focused on the floor, and my mouth was controlled by food. Whenever he started, I sublimated my feelings by eating. After all, shoveling food into my mouth would protect me from saying anything "wrong," which could result in more violence. [Fortunately, we divorced in 1997. I returned to school full-time in 1998, completed my B.A. in 1999, and then my M.A. in 2004.]

While working on my thesis in graduate school, I first read *Women's Ways of Knowing* by Mary Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, and discovered that verbal abuse can be one of the factors contributing to the *silencing* of women: "In trying to understand the experience of voice for the silent women, we. . .found that. . .[w]ords were perceived as weapons. Words were used to separate and diminish people, not to connect and empower them. The silent women worried that they would be punished just for using words.' Any words" (24). Silence feels much safer. Unfortunately, silence is also "an extreme in denial of self and in dependence on external authority for direction" (24).

Authority. Almost from birth, in fact, we learn about "authority." the people who have it are respected, and the people who don't are usually trying to attain some level of it in their own lives. Schools, for instance, represent

an institution where figures of authority abound: Teachers.

Coming to the Academy

Every year, women from all races and backgrounds enter the walls of the academy for the first time. Each woman has a multitude of experiences to share. yet *some* women lack the courage (?) to raise their *voice* above a whisper. As part of the general course requirements for all students, a first-year writing course is required. The teacher's goal is to prepare students to succeed in college writing. But to do this the teacher must help women establish a voice.

The most commonly used approach is to teach a student to think about the rhetorical purpose of his/her writing. If students struggle with the idea of audience, the teacher might try to connect these students to the world around them by having students think about the many "communities" they belong to: students, roommates, husbands/wives/partners, employees, consumers, citizens, taxpayers, etc. To further their analytical skills, these students are then instructed to consider the "roles" they play within each of these communities, consider the type of "language" used within the community, evaluate whether the community confines or liberates the members, calculate the [metaphoric] cost of belonging to the community, and then weigh that against any potential rewards of membership.

What such an approach may overlook, though, is that women and men have different styles of communicating and writing.

> Anecdotal reports as well as research on sex differences indicate that girls and women have more difficulty than boys and men in asserting their authority or considering themselves as authorities. . .in expressing themselves in public so that others will listen. . .in gaining respect of others for their minds and their ideas. (Belenky 5)

Belenky *et al,* urge teachers to consider using alternate approaches for classroom instruction, approaches which rely more heavily on *understanding* (process) than on *knowledge* (product). Women, who have been historically taught

to rely on non-confrontational methods for solving conflicts, have learned to speak quietly, in a small voice, and defer all knowledge to a person of authority [typically a man].

Right or wrong, women and men really *do* engage in conversation differently. Deborah Tannen, a Ph.D. who teaches linguistics at the university level, has written extensively on the subject of communication, specifically with regard to the speaker's "culture, class, ethnic, and sexual boundaries" (*Reflections on Language* 225). While compiling observations garnered from her research, Tannen notes that "[m]en use conversation to establish, maintain, and confirm their status; women talk to foster intimacy and closeness" (226). Understanding that these are patterns / styles of conversation which were established long before the woman entered the academy, it becomes more problematic when the blame for being less direct in conversation is placed on the woman.

* * *

March 1982

I was a senior in high school when I heard about the change in the social security rules from a friend of mine. She told me that all benefits were going to terminate on a child's 18th birthday, unless they were enrolled as a full-time college student by the end of April. She was already enrolled at a college downtown, and would be taking classes on Sundays through May, and then in June, the schedule changed to weekday courses.

When my mom heard about it, she enrolled me right away. "What?!" my brain screamed. I was all of 17 years old, trying to enjoy my senior year in high school, and now she expected me to go to full-time college downtown on Sundays?! I hated the whole idea. But, a week later I was on the "L," going downtown, to attend Chicago City-Wide College.

I was enrolled in 4 college classes that April morning: Social Science 101, Literature 113, Math 112, and Humanities 201, based on some arbitrary system that the school had devised. I remember sitting in that math class, feeling that I must be in there by mistake (because I took Advanced Algebra as a freshman, Advanced Geometry as a sophomore, and Algebra II Trigonometry

as a junior in high school), and waited until the "break" to approach the teacher. He was reading something at his desk, and I was so painfully shy, so I waited for him to look up. While I was quietly explaining the situation to the teacher, I noticed that his eyes were no longer focusing on mine. They were examining my body.

For me, the message was clear. I was to sit in that classroom, and darn well appreciate it, because he was doing me *the favor by keeping my social security benefits coming. Furthermore, his behavior was just another example of masculine power and authority, and there wasn't anything I could do about it, so I shut down. I spent the balance of that course reading magazines in the back row of the classroom, and doing no more than was absolutely necessary.*

* * *

An ability to participate in conversation is not the only challenge some women face, however. Women students who have been victimized by a significant other comprise a sub-set within the college community. Generally speaking, these women have been subjected to verbal / physical / sexual abuse in their lives, and have internalized messages regarding a "woman's place" within our societal structure. Catherine Lanigan and Jodee Blanco, co-authors of *The Evolving Woman: Intimate Confessions of Surviving Mr. Wrong,* took these women and their previous experiences seriously and devoted the third chapter to the exploration of the role of education in these women's lives: "Whether it was getting a GED, college degree or specialized job training, education became the electricity that powered the internal light of their evolution" (45). Education, then, becomes the key for survival for many abused women for many reasons, but it is also a difficult struggle, because the women tend to suffer from lower self-esteem levels than other women.

* * *

January 1989

I'm so excited to be back in school! After getting married, and living in West Germany for 2-1/2 years before he went AWOL from the Army, I'm thankful to be back, even if it

is only on a part-time basis. My husband won't let me attend full-time, because he says we can't afford to lose my income and *pay tuition both. I'm happy with the compromise, though, because now he can no longer use that threat of "sending" me "back to the states" like he did during every fight in Germany.*

This is my fifth school already, a fact which I don't like to talk about, because people will think that I failed, or got kicked out, or something "bad" like that. My first college was the semester-long hell at Chicago City-Wide College, then I tried "going away" to Bethany Junior College in Mankato, MN. If it hadn't been such a tiny school, I might not have gotten so homesick during that first semester.

When I refused to go back after Christmas break, my mom insisted that her terms included registering at Loop College, in downtown Chicago again, so I did. And I hated it. So, I thought I would try Augustana College in Sioux Falls, SD, because my sister had graduated from there. Unfortunately, I ended up with the roommate from hell, and packed out of there during J-term (January).

This time, my mom let me register for classes at Northeastern Illinois University, in a first-ring suburb of Chicago, and I stayed there for almost a year, until I met my future husband. Somehow he convinced me that being offered the Assistant-Manager position at my fabric store job was more important than getting a college education, so I quit college in 1984.

Anyway, we have an apartment close to Northeastern, so I transferred all of my earlier college credits there, and am enrolled in one class this semester. Earth Science 122. Because it's just a silly, required course, I look forward to being bored for the next semester. We meet in a large auditorium, I sit in the middle as usual, and am too shy to talk with any of my classmates (even though I may occasionally laugh, out loud, at something someone nearby says).

The professor lectures to us from a podium, and speaks into a microphone, so that students all the way in the back can hear, and once in a while he throws out a question to the students. Well, tonight I was confident that I knew the answer, so I raised my hand (sure that he wouldn't call on me, anyway.

I was in the middle of a great big auditorium!). Anyway, he called on me. Then, he made me stand up, before repeating my answer, because he was having a difficult time hearing me speak (I was quiet as usual). Before I was even done speaking, the professor started laughing! He repeated into the microphone what he thought *he had heard (not at all what I had been trying to say), and I sank back into my chair, mortified.*

I had felt so confident in that stupid Earth Science class, but I blew it, because I was too shy to speak any louder. My husband was no support either, telling me that I had been an idiot *for even trying to answer in the first place. According to him, teachers hold all of the knowledge. I am just there to receive the information, write down everything the professor lectures about, and regurgitate all information back onto the test. (Okay, so he doesn't use big words like "regurgitate.")*

Maybe he's right. An auditorium is designed to place students in a role in which they merely receive information from the instructor, not a place to share opinions and ideas with one another. Note to self: accept my "woman's role," and speak with a quieter voice.

* * *

You see, for women, having a *voice* is ultimately more than writing successfully for a composition class. It's about being heard. Every single day, women face odds which seem insurmountable to many outsiders, and they need to be able to expose those struggles as a means for change. For women who have been physically attacked/assaulted, the need to locate a voice with which to report the crime and face their attacker, is a pivotal movement towards recovery. For women who have been oppressed by their culture/tradition, establishing clear, strong voices which will make others sit up and take notice is essential if change is to occur. For women who are single mothers, speaking their own voices impacts directly on "survival" issues such as getting equal pay, equal rights, and/or adequate health care benefits for their families. Unfortunately, the list goes on, because women have traditionally been taught to defer their needs to the male voice of authority.

On the college campus, one of the first courses in which women are instructed to engage with a sense of "authority" is the first-year writing course. "Is there a rule about which 'style' I should use, or can I write the way I'm most comfortable?" "How do I know what my teacher thinks is 'good' writing versus what is 'bad' writing?" And, "I have to 'argue' something for this research paper? You're kidding. What if my teacher feels the opposite way that I feel?" For teachers, there is a different set of concerns. namely, to guide students through the course in such a way that the lessons will make sense regardless of departmental major (e.g., English, science, or music). and to do it in such a way that another teacher on the campus doesn't think that you didn't "do your job" in teaching those students "how to write" properly. For me, there is also a third consideration: teaching students how to write in a way that will be acceptable outside of the academy as well.

Peter Elbow urges readers to locate their personal power through writing, because "[p]ower means the power to make a difference, to make a dent" in the cause the writer is fighting for (*Writing with Power* 280). Yet this sense of power can be elusive for so many, if the student doesn't get a clear sense of the teacher.

* * *

Spring 2000

My son's pre-school teacher, who I'll call Gloria, is enrolled in a freshman writing course, but she is not a typical freshman. Gloria is a returning student, enrolled in only one class a semester for the last 2 semesters, since she works full-time. She is a mother, divorced from an abusive husband, and is working in a low-paying job because she receives no child support from the children's father. Over the course of her life she has been repeatedly silenced: Verbally put-down by her father from birth, she endured years of taunting from kids in school because of her weight, and later married a man who discredited her value as a wife and mother.

Gloria's first assignment: write a paper which describes how emission testing programs in the state are impacting an individual's right to drive a car. Gloria writes her

paper, turns it in, and is confused when she gets it back from the teacher. The teacher wrote across the top, in big red letters: "You needed to convince me. I look forward to your revision." With no clear commentary from the teacher about what makes the paper wrong, Gloria is stymied. She doesn't understand why the teacher would imply that the paper wasn't convincing enough, but Gloria has no opportunity to meet with the teacher one-on-one, because Gloria needs to be at her own job during the teacher's posted office hours. Seeing no other way around her situation, Gloria's voice remains unheard.

Next assignment for the course: "Write a paper in which you define a need left unaddressed by the last governor. You need to include why this issue is important to you, and why it should alternately matter to the rest of the citizens (i.e. your classmates). You will be also be presenting your paper to the class after the holiday break." Gloria has several issues in mind for her paper. the lack of adequate health-care-coverage for herself and her children, the notions of welfare reform, the cutting of some essential assistance-programs. but how does she make it relevant to the other students in her class? And more importantly, how does she challenge the wisdom of the former (male) governor? With a male professor teaching the course?

* * *

It is possible that Gloria will "find" her *voice* again, as she gains confidence in her "right" to be in college (by getting some good grades under her academic "belt"), but the best that Gloria can do right now is to focus her attention on fulfilling more of the rudimentary requirements of the assignment. approaching the assignment from a distanced perspective, relying on statistical data to convey its own message, and satisfying the page requirement. After struggling with her own fears that the teacher would reject the paper simply because of its controversial topic, Gloria decided to choose a different topic for her paper.

Women need to learn how to engage in argumentative discourse and declare their own sense of authority through use of a *voice* in their writing if they hope to compete in the real

world. Thank goodness that Belenky *et al* provide readers with a sense of hope, suggesting that women will master the skills which will establish a sense of authority by the time they graduate from college, *if* teachers will adjust the curriculum for women.

> We have argued in this book that educators can help women develop their own authentic voices if they emphasize connection over separation, understanding and acceptance over assessment, and collaboration over debate; if they accord respect to and allow time for the knowledge that emerges from firsthand experience; if instead of imposing their own expectations and arbitrary requirements, they encourage students to evolve their own patterns of work based on the problems they are pursuing. (Belenky 229)

Women scholars have been quick to acknowledge, though, that *our* experiences cannot be universally categorized any more effectively than the earlier practice of evaluating women by men's experiences had been, and any discussion of women's experiences in the academy becomes naturally more complex when issues of class, sexuality, and race are considered.

Women of Color

Referring to *both* native (African-American, Asian-American, Native-American, Latina) and non-native (international) students, women of color bring a multitude of voices to the academy. voices which cannot be treated as one. Women of color need the academy to recognize, and understand, that students no longer share any common denominator when they enter the halls of the academy. sharing neither the same goals and expectations from a college education itself nor the notion that students only have one, single, "true" voice and identity. Joining the academy from differing histories, past experiences, culturally *and* socially imposed views of women's "roles" in society, women of color must confront an entirely new level of complexity in the conversation of *voice* in the composition classroom.

Addressing some of the more unique experiences women

of color are subject to, for instance, bell hooks (who happens to be an African-American, a feminist, and a woman) has given women of color a voice through her many novels and essays. In *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, hooks uses personal reflection to explore issues she feels are important to understanding how women of color experience both the world-at-large and the world contained within the walls of the academy.

* * *

Spring semester, 2003

There is a young African-American student named Anita, and an exchange-student from Thailand, using the Americanized name of Helen, enrolled in the class. The other 23 students are traditional (Caucasian) students, from small towns / farming communities. The class was given a reading assignment the night before, focusing on racism, and now they come to class ready to discuss. I had the students first write a paragraph on their first racial memory (an activity which bell hooks has used in her own classroom), and then class discussion commences.

While the students are reading their paragraphs to the class, I noticed that students either state that they "never knew" race existed (denying racism as an issue), or shared stories about a "black" person who factored into their experience. When Anita reads her paragraph, she focuses on her move to America seven years ago. and about hearing a racial slur for the first time. A girl by the name of Karen asks Anita if she is more offended by the word "N[redacted]r" or the word "Bitch." Anita looks down at her backpack, and quietly admits that she finds them equally offensive. because she is both a woman and an African-American. With that simple shift in body posture and decrease in audibility, Anita illustrated the power held by the dominant culture. even within the classroom.

Two more students share, and then it is time for Helen. Helen shares how her first experience occurred just last week. when her dorm room door was taped shut. Karen, without missing a beat, immediately asks, "Well, how do you know it was racially motivated? I mean, that kind of stuff happens all of the time." It

happens all of the time where, Karen? In college? Or, in America? Helen makes no reply, choosing to return to the silence she finds most safe, because she is surrounded by members of the dominant culture. Caucasian students, a Caucasian teacher, and more than likely a Caucasian dorm R.A. who has done nothing about the incident. I sit and wonder how these students are supposed to gain an assertive sense of self, and hope to establish their own voice.

* * *

Unfortunately for too many women of color, success means separating a "personal" *voice* from the *voice* they use in their "work". altering their *voices* to that which is respected by the academy. Yes, even in this new millennium, "academic" writing would still teach us to all sound the same. sans a personal *voice*. which is even more difficult for women of color, because they are neither white nor male.

Suggestions for Change

"Expressive" writing (writing with *voice*) needs to be accepted as an alternative to "academic" writing, so that students have an opportunity to grow into successful, confident women. women who can make *real* contributions with their future careers. For Gloria, an inclusion of her voice would help the healing process and her re-establishment of self-esteem. Likewise, Anita's and Helen's voices could reveal new information about other cultures and ways of thinking, making our global world that much smaller. How do we, their composition teachers, help women to become more confident writers?

1. Journals. I like to have students write in journals. While it is not a daily assignment, I do list it as a homework assignment on the syllabus. Some of the journal entries are to come from personal reactions to the reading assignment and/or additional room for practicing what the chapter recommends at the end, but my "requirement" is simply that they write a one-page journal entry.
2. Actively reading students' journals. Yes, I read their journals. While I don't collect them at regular intervals, I will announce that I will be collecting them during our next class, and then I read them. (Peter Elbow suggests that if you can read ev-

erything that your students write, they aren't writing enough; on the other hand, I've heard students talk about how their high school English teacher NEVER read their journals. merely counted for a certain number of pages to be written on.) **NOTE:** My students think it's "kind of cool" when I respond back to something that they wrote in their journals.

3. Freewriting. I confess, I am a real fan of Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and Donald Murray. Freewriting is such a liberating activity! How many of us teachers freewrite (on the computer keyboard), and yet we don't connect it back to that specific terminology? If you've never done it, try it. And if you have, are you "making" your students do it as well? I always have my students freewrite in their journals. sometimes in class, and sometimes as a homework assignment (on a topic I give them on the way out the door).
4. Give students options/choices. Every single time I assign a paper (or journal entry), I give my students a hand-out (or verbal instructions) on the parameters of the assignment. and then I give them "permission" to decide which direction they want to take the assignment. (For instance, "Write a Position Paper, on a topic that you feel very strongly about, but be sensitive to your reader as well. The final draft needs to be X-number of pages in length, and will be due . . -.") Topic selection is immeasurably important to the writer's sense of ownership that is part of voice. **NOTE:** I also introduce them to Tom Romano's approach of blending genres and give students the option of either writing a "traditional" research paper, or a multi-genre one.
5. Collaboration / Group Work. I confess. before graduate school I hated the idea of sharing my writing with others. (Maybe because the "other" would have always been my hyper-critical ex-husband?) My very first semester in graduate school, however, my teacher asked me to read my paper out loud to the class (about 15 other graduate students, 10 of which were teaching assistants like myself), and I was terrified. I felt my face flush, heard my voice trembling, and wanted to crawl under the desk when I was done. But, they loved it! My peers told me what a great writer I was! Nobody but teachers had

ever said that to me before. and I felt... GIGANTIC! So, make your students work together. it could do them a world of good.

6. Arrange the desks in a circle - and include one for yourself. Another interesting outcome of my graduate school experience. circle sitting. Not only does it put every student on the same "level playing field," but it makes it harder for students to sleep, do other homework, or text-message their friends. And the fact that you, the teacher, are a part of that circle throws the students off balance just enough to make the classroom environment more conducive to writing with voice.

So, there you have my 6-steps to developing a writer's voice. I look forward to sharing more with you, my colleagues, as my journey to "a better understanding of voice in composition studies" continues.

Before I had a voice,
people told me what to do.
Before I had a voice,
I did what people told me.
Before I had a voice,
I was powerless.
Before I had a voice,
I was in a prison of my own design.

Now that I found my voice,
there's no shutting me up!
I shout out my message
for all to hear.
It's not important that you know my name .
just as long as you honor your own.
Now that I found my voice,
I am FREE!!!
to be ME!!!

- JPLukowski, 12-15-02

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The Boy Scientist

Roger Hart

When I began teaching junior high science more than thirty-five years ago, I found *The Boy Scientist* on the bookshelf in my classroom. I read it and was impressed by the interesting stories about famous scientists—mostly men—and the clarity with which the author explained the fundamental laws of physics. I was puzzled, however, by the absence of any "girl scientist" book on the shelf and wondered in what ways such a book might differ from the boy's text. I looked for *The Girl Scientist* in my room, in the school library, and at the town library but could not find a copy, so I called the publisher. The woman on the other end of the phone told me there was no girl scientist book.

"Doesn't that seem odd?" I asked.

"No," she answered. "Girls aren't interested in science."

I asked if she'd ever heard of Marie Curie, Lise Meitner, Barbara McClintock or Rosalind Franklin. She said no.

That was my introduction to gender inequalities in the classroom. What, I wondered, were other ways that I might be sending the wrong message to my students beside the books I kept on the shelves?

In an effort to answer my question, I began informal classroom research. I observed that the boys were quicker to answer questions and, therefore were more likely to be called upon. Boys were also more likely to answer with authority, even when

they were wrong. Girls frequently ended their answers on a rising inflection that made it sound as if they were asking a question. I also noticed that when students were paired up with lab partners of the opposite sex, the boys usually took charge, mixing chemicals, measuring items, or dissecting while the girls watched and took notes. The boys acted like they knew what they were doing, despite the fact that the girls often scored higher on written tests than their male lab partners. Clearly, gender was an issue in the science classroom. The girls were being robbed of their equal place in the class, and the boys were being cheated—often by their own behavior and my own unknowing complicity—of hearing from students who could contribute a great deal to the class dynamic.

In her essay "Feminist Pedagogy," Susan Jarratt claims "feminist pedagogy does not entail an overt discussion of feminism as a politics or movement" and that "this pedagogy must be shaped to fit the circumstances and possibilities under which you work" (115, 126). Without promoting a specific agenda but by encouraging "the presence of the whole person into the educational scene," I—testosterone not withstanding—became a practitioner of feminist pedagogy (123). I encouraged all my students to answer questions with authority, and I waited longer for hands to go up before I called on a student. I required both partners in every lab exercise to participate actively and take notes, and I continued to investigate gender differences in the classroom. Whenever possible, I fought against the myth that science was the domain of boys. In the years that followed, the high school physics teacher complained that his class was being overrun by girls. I was thrilled.

Today, we have evidence that gender differences are far more extensive than my observations indicated years ago. Studies of cross-sex conversations have shown that men are responsible for the overwhelming majority of interruptions (West and Zimmerman 107; Tannen, You Don't Understand 210). The study by Candace West and Don Zimmerman also refutes the claim that men interrupt to get in a word and conclude that, if anything, women frequently must interrupt to "get a word in edgewise" (109). Studies have also shown that in two- way conversations, women

ask more than twice as many questions as men do (Fishman 95). These questions frequently function as a means of getting permission to talk or as a way of giving authority to the one questioned. Deborah Tannen goes on to suggest in *The Argument Culture* that even classroom debate and the Socratic method of teaching may be based on a male culture that values winning (256-290).

The challenge, then, is how to apply this knowledge and the volumes of additional gender research to the benefit of all students in the composition class. One possibility is the decentralized classroom suggested by process pedagogues. Joyce Armstrong Carrol offers "statistical proof that training teachers in process actually helps teachers interact more effectively with their students, thus producing better student writing" (Rubin 96-97). Jarrat also states that feminist pedagogy and process pedagogy share many characteristics: emphasis on process over product, the use of collaboration, journal writing, and narrative, to name a few (115). In addition to employing these process techniques in my own composition class, I also try to make students aware of the gender roles we frequently fall into when we communicate. By becoming aware of these roles, students and teacher can, if they wish, begin to step outside them. Those who habitually interrupt have the opportunity to become good listeners. Those who are hesitant to answer questions experience a classroom more open to their participation.

But does this mean that males must sacrifice their masculinity in a feminist classroom? During a dinner I attended two years ago, the poet Robert Bly, author of *Iron John*—a book many feel ignited the men's movement—sat next to a female professor he had never met. Surprisingly, Bly played the role of the perfect listener. He didn't interrupt and he gave the professor his undivided attention when she talked. He also did a remarkable job of passing along visual and auditory signals that he understood what she was saying. It was a remarkable lesson for me and those men who feel threatened by the feminist movement. Freed of the stereotypical male role, Bly demonstrated an ability to communicate that could be a model for all of us. We might even say he demonstrated self-actual-

ization, an integral part of expressive pedagogy (Burnham 33).

But how do listening skills or the frequency with which one student interrupts another affect writing? I suspect the answer can be found on a number of different levels. On the most basic level, teachers want to create a classroom environment that promotes learning and respect. When members of the class, male or female, are deprived of their voices, the entire class is shortchanged. And teachers who simply "put the desks in a circle" to decentralize authority may only be shifting the authority from themselves to the more outspoken students, especially if the class is not made aware that many of us often fall into ruts of interrupting or not actively listening to someone else.

On another level, it seems that a heightened awareness of gender roles in communication can improve students' critical thinking. Students begin to ask questions about who wrote the text and why. Was the purpose of an essay to explore different points of view of a controversial topic or was it written as an argument in which one side is right and the other wrong? Students might also begin examining their own writing the same way and, in the process, take a closer look at audience. By structuring a classroom in which all students take on more authority—I don't think you can give authority—the feminist teacher can foster individual strengths and better understand individual differences.

I do not go as far as bell hooks, who writes that the "liberatory feminist movement aims to transform society by eradicating patriarchy, by ending sexism and sexist oppression, by challenging the politics of domination on all fronts" (Jarratt 117). I'm not sure hooks would even accept the possibility of a male feminist. Despite my differences with hooks, I think the essentialists are good for the feminist movement. They give it energy and they challenge us to examine our own classroom practices. I agree with Jarratt's observation that the feminist movement ranges over a wide spectrum of beliefs and practices involving an awareness of gender roles and how they can influence dynamics within the classroom (117). As such, feminist pedagogy shares theory and techniques with process,

collaborative, and expressivist pedagogies by valuing process over product, helping students find their voices, and decentralizing the classroom. Both male and female teachers with a wide range of theoretical approaches to teaching composition have the opportunity to incorporate feminist pedagogy in their composition classes. I think all students will benefit when it happens.

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Teaching Ethnography in the Composition Classroom

Gwen Hart

When I learned I would be teaching a section of composition for a learning community titled "Psychology: Understanding the Person," I wanted to find a focus that would fit with the theme better than the rhetorical modes approach I had used in previous semesters. I paired the textbook *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research* by Bonnie Stone Sunstein and Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater with Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried,* a novel which follows a group of soldiers through the Vietnam War and its aftermath. This approach allowed me to introduce my students to ethnography, the written study of another culture. While not every student's paper was exceptional, the writing my students produced as they studied subcultures such as a volunteer fire department, the local airport, and skateboarding parks was, overall, much better than what I had received in previous classes. Based on my own observations, my students' written reactions after completing their ethnographies, and other teacher-researchers' inquiries into this subject, I believe that ethnographic research is more effective than traditional research for improving the research writing skills of first-year composition students.

What is Ethnography?

Ethnography is the "written representation of a culture (or selected aspects of a culture)" (Van Maanen 1). Rituals,

dress, songs, speech, actions, artifacts, and social hierarchies are all included under the ethnographic umbrella. Ethnographies point out the "choices and restrictions that reside at the very heart of social life" (Van Maanen 1). Why are desks arranged in rows in classrooms? How do we know what to wear and what to yell at a football game? What other invisible rules do we follow as we go through our daily lives? These are the kinds of questions ethnographers investigate. The method of ethnography is fieldwork, going out and observing the culture first-hand. Ethnographies are anthropological in orientation, often in-depth, book-length studies of a culture as observed over a span of several years. Obviously, first-year composition students do not have the time or expertise to complete works of this magnitude. But ethnography can be adapted for use in the composition classroom. "Mini" or "micro" ethnographies of a more limited scope and time frame can allow first- year composition students to reap the benefits of ethnographic work.

FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research encourages students to investigate local subcultures. My students were able to spend time at research sites such as a local tattoo parlor and a nearby skate park. They interviewed informants such as pilots at the local airport and Vietnam veterans participating in an oral history project. Armed with notebooks and cameras, my students set out to record the subcultures and attempt to interpret their findings.

I required that the subculture they investigated be one they were not members of, and also one which they could get permission from the group members to study. This was key to avoiding one of the major pitfalls of ethnographic research: the inability to collect data. Two of my students wanted to do a study of the local morgue, but, upon investigation, discovered they could not have access to the morgue itself. Instead, they ended up studying a group of pathologists working with samples from live patients rather than dead bodies.

How Does the Use of Ethnography Relate to Other Approaches to Composition?

Using ethnography in the composition classroom can involve aspects of many theories of composition. Ethnographic

writing can be incorporated into a Service Learning project, as two of my students did who spent time in an alternative classroom. The Expressivist insistence on the writer finding his or her authentic voice is built into the first-hand knowledge-gathering that ethnographic essays require. Process pedagogues will also relate to the multiple drafts, visions and revisions that are crucial to finding and refining an angle on the culture being studied. Collaborative work can easily be incorporated through the use of partner projects, which I will discuss in detail later. Feminist teachers of composition might also find things to like in the ethnographic approach. While ethnography does not ask students to critique, or to discover "what is wrong" with the culture they are studying, the power dynamics of the culture, both overt and subtle, are keys to understanding the culture.

In addition, Cultural Studies followers will be pleased to note that everything at the research site becomes a text—the "No Skateboarding" signs inside an indoor skate park, the songs played at a college hockey game, and even the posters for a sorority event placed in the dormitories. Obviously, different instructors will choose to highlight different things and will tailor their ethnographic readings and assignment accordingly. When I argue for the use of ethnography in the composition classroom, then, I am not arguing for a "new" theory of composition. Instead, I am arguing for a mode of teaching and learning that is flexible and fits with many instructors' goals.

Benefits of the Ethnographic Approach

The ethnographic approach has many benefits, including allowing students to become more involved with their research topics as they search for information from primary and secondary sources, getting students out into the community to make contact with people unlike themselves, and guiding students as they acquire the important skills of observation, analysis, interpretation, and synthesis by triangulating their data and forming and testing hypotheses.

I think one of the biggest benefits of the ethnographic approach is that students get out into the world and become ac-

tive researchers from the very beginning. Many of my students commented in their final portfolios that they enjoyed the fact that they did not spend all of their time reading, and that they got to go out and explore their topics first-hand, through interactions with people, in addition to traditional library research.

In his essay "Students as Ethnographers: Encouraging Authority," William W. Wright states that "[e]thnography encourages students to see themselves as the experts, authorities on their subject" (105). This new confidence is a direct result of students being able to collect data from primary sources. One of my students, Chloe, compared herself to a scientist "looking for answers to a hypothesis and being able to interact with the actual environment." She saw herself in an active role as someone uniquely in control of her project, similar to the way a scientist is in control of, but can also be surprised by, the results of an experiment. Instead of the "disheartening experience of writing to an audience that knows more about [the] subject and will always know more about [the] subject" than they did, these students were very conscious of teaching me and the rest of the class what they had learned (Wright 107). Their final presentations were not simply the ideas of experts they had lined up neatly in a row, but rather their own insights set against those of the experts. They had a basis from which to agree or argue what they read in books, magazines, and web sites.

When students go out into the community, collect data, and become experts on their topics, something else also happens: they discover their voices as writers. This is not a new idea in the field of composition. Ken Macrorie, in his book *The I-Search Paper*, bemoans the use of what he calls "Engfish," student prose that tries to sound academic and ends up stilted, distanced, and boring (25). Macrorie maintains that students need to get out and own their material so that they can then report on those topics in their own voices. Davis and Shadle, in their article "'Building a Mystery': Alternative Research Writing and the Academic Act of Seeking," assert that the traditional freshman composition research paper is "vacant, clichéd and templated" (417). They give a history of the research paper as-

signment and argue for alternative approaches that allow students freedom to learn and grow. Although they do not mention ethnography specifically, they do bring up several related ideas, such as the personal research essay, akin to Macrorie's I-Search paper, and I believe that ethnography would fit their definition of a new, improved research assignment. Instead of filling in a cookie-cutter thesis statement which argues a predetermined point, the ethnographic approach asks students to observe the subculture, make hypotheses, and then test these hypotheses against a wide variety of sources. These papers are often narrative in nature, like I-Search and other personal research essays.

In her paper presented at the 2000 Conference on College Composition and Communication, "Risking Exposure: Branch Campus Writers Go Public," Helen Collins Sitler, an instructor at a branch campus of a mid-sized state university in southwest Pennsylvania, describes ethnography as a "successful pedagogy for positioning [her] students as capable scholars" (5). Her students, many of them developmental writers who were "among the most at-risk students" in the state university system, gave a presentation at the main branch campus during an undergraduate research conference (7). Their "presentation was more substantial than that of the senior Technical Writing students who presented in the same session with them," which amazed other faculty members (7). Sitler maintains that her students had never before felt ownership over their writing, and for the first time they were able to gain the confidence to speak in an eloquent and persuasive manner (7).

Although Sitler's "underprepared" students underwent a more dramatic change than my learning community students, I saw the same process at work in my classroom. The writing I received from them on their ethnographic projects was better than I expected. One of my students, Pete, even remarked in his final portfolio that he felt his writing came together and felt more "fluent" after he had had a chance to talk with workers at the state-run mental health facility he visited. The face-to-face interactions directly affected his confidence, and therefore his writing.

Because ethnography is new, and therefore intimidating

for many students, I gave my students the option of working in pairs. They had to write their own final papers, but they could do their observations together. This seemed especially feasible since these students were in a learning community, lived together in the dormitory, and took several classes together, making their schedules more compatible than most students' schedules in a regular composition classroom. Out of my class of twenty-five students, sixteen students chose to work in pairs, and nine students chose to work alone. Of the students who worked in pairs, all but one group reported having a positive experience. Two typical comments were "I wasn't alone so I was more outgoing" and "the nice thing about having a partner is you can have someone to discuss observations with." Building the courage to approach strangers and ask if you can study them is intimidating. Partners seemed to help with that. Also, since ethnography is filtered through the consciousness of the observer, having two observers meant students could bounce ideas off each other, perhaps disagree, and then be forced to rethink their interpretations. This type of collaborative experience, in which students relied on each other for meaning-making and for help and motivation in working on their projects, also helped to decenter the classroom.

My students who chose not to work in pairs did so because they were afraid of scheduling conflicts and having to rely on someone else to get their projects done. I asked my students at the end of the semester, however, if they would have liked to have been assigned feedback partners. While working on their own individual ethnographies, these students could have worked together over the course of the semester, becoming familiar with each other's projects and therefore operating, in a limited way, as a second set of eyes for each other. Most students responded positively to this idea. Even though they were glad they had conducted their ethnographies individually, they felt they had missed out on the benefits of having a partner who was familiar with their projects. Also, one of my students suggested that, by making students accountable to each other during these sessions, the partners will help students to stay "on track" with their projects. While I would not require students to conduct ethnographies in

pairs, especially since students who are not in a learning community would have even more trouble coordinating their schedules, I think I will try the peer-review pair approach in the future.

Learning from Student Feedback

While I received much positive student feedback about the ethnography project, two comments kept reappearing in my students' final portfolios. One, students wanted more time to conduct their ethnographic studies. This was often a logistical issue. Although we spent roughly half of the semester on the ethnography project, by the time students found a subculture to study and received permission to do so, they had to quickly work observation and interview time into their schedules. When I use this approach again, I think I will at least start the topic selection process earlier, so that students have their sites approved and in place in plenty of time to do the real ethnographic research. I was excited by my students' desire to have more time to work on their projects. Instead of being glad their projects were finished and turned in, they wanted to learn more about their topics. They had experienced some level of success, but they were also aware of what they could have done with more time. Abbie wished she could have attended skateboard competitions that took place earlier in the fall; Chloe thought that with a few more weeks she could have gotten the students in the alternative classroom she visited to open up to her more. If nothing else, these students learned that it takes time, patience, and planning to carry out successful research.

When I asked students to identify the most frustrating part of conducting their ethnographies, they told me they found it difficult to interweave all of their different sources: observations, interviews, books, articles, and television shows. This was also exciting to me because I knew that my students had, for the most part, collected more different kinds of data than they had in past research papers. Therefore, selecting and arranging their data were very challenging tasks indeed. The narrative nature of the ethnographic paper was new to them as well. Telling the story of a culture is a complex endeavor, and mak-

ing the story hang together means focusing on what matters. I did try to combat some of their anxiety about having to "use everything" by having them turn in portfolios, an idea from Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's text. In their portfolios, students could represent the work that went into their final papers, even the material that wouldn't fit neatly with the angle they chose to report on. They organized all of their notes and findings in a folder, labeled each piece, and created a table of contents.

Still, I think I could have prepared them better for the final reality that not all of their material would make its way into their paper. It was crucial that students find an angle on their culture. For example, Lynsie and Chris followed the trials of the only female firefighter in a volunteer fire station, and Bryan looked at security at the Mankato regional airport since the 9-11 attacks. These students did not have these angles in mind when they began doing their research, however. First they had to explore the subculture and see what was going on. They probably could have used more time and more prodding to find an angle. In other words, I think their frustration was a failure on my part more than a failure of the ethnographic approach itself.

How Does Ethnography Prepare Students for Other College-Level Work?

Ethnography might be fun, interesting, and empowering for student writers. It may even allow students to produce some of their best writing to date. But how does it do what the composition class is supposed to do—that is, prepare student writers for advanced college-level work? Just last week, I met with a faculty book group concerning creating significant learning experiences. As often happens in our bimonthly sessions, our discussion deteriorated into complaining about students rather than looking for ways to improve our teaching methods. A tax law professor said that when he puts students out into the world they don't have the interpersonal skills to deal with real clients. Although these students are competent in doing returns, they freeze up when they have to deal with the real people behind the returns. Several education faculty said that students sent out to observe classrooms

are unable to see and interpret what is going on in the classroom, and so they complain that they are not doing anything worthwhile.

As my colleagues spoke, I was struck by how a background in ethnography would help students in both of these situations. The students in my class had to negotiate their entry into a culture foreign to them, which meant gaining the confidence to deal with strangers. As one of my students commented, "I have never done an interview for a paper before. I think it was a good experience and will help me later in life." Another student wrote about the ethnography project: "It got me out and about talking with people. It has made me less scared of experiencing new things." Both of these students developed interpersonal skills which will serve them well as they enter advanced classes which require students to take those first tentative steps into the larger world of their chosen professions. My students also spent a great deal of time honing their skills as careful observers, drawing maps, making field notes, conducting interviews, and trying to make sense of what they saw and heard. I do not think any of these students would come back from a classroom observation with an empty notebook. Of course, this was not a fast or easy process. My students did several practice observations and read professional and student examples in their text.

Since we used *The Things They Carried* and other readings in *FieldWorking: Reading and Writing Research* as objects of observation, my students also practiced close-reading skills and had an opportunity to learn from each other's responses to the readings. They learned what to look for when they encounter something new, be it a written text, a visual text, or a scene that is unfolding before them. We cannot expect students to gain these skills on their own. Ethnographic research provides the scaffolding that supports students as they make this journey.

Resources for Teachers

In addition to Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater's text, I encountered several books in my research that may be of help to teachers who want to use an ethnographic approach in the composition classroom. *The Curious Reader: Explor-*

ing Personal and Academic Inquiry, by Bruce Ballenger and Michelle Payne, includes a chapter titled "Seeing Thickly: Ethnography as a Mode of Inquiry," and also includes ethnographic readings and techniques in several other chapters (203-270). This would be a good book for the teacher who wanted to include an ethnographic project as one type of research essay in a course which required several research essays.

Another resource is Wendy Bishop's *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Up, Writing It Down, and Reading It*. A how-to book for would-be ethnographers, Bishop's text provides a good overview of the history of and move towards ethnographic approaches. She also discusses practical concerns about designing studies, collecting data, representing the "other" in an ethical way, and responding to ethnographic research (qualitative as opposed to quantitative research). This book would work well if paired with a book-length ethnography such as Dennis Covington's *Salvation on Sand Mountain: Snake Handling and Redemption in America*.

Last but not least, I think our students are one of our greatest resources. Mine have taught me a lot already about how to teach ethnography in the future. I have also collected several of their papers, with their permission, and I intend to use them as examples in future courses. Several of my students also suggested that I invite former students to discuss their ethnographic projects and answer questions. If first-year students see sophomores who have succeeded in conducting this type of research, they may see the project as one they, too, can undertake. This suggestion is also exciting in that my former students now see themselves as experienced student researchers in the position to help guide other student researchers. Perhaps that is the strongest evidence I can offer for the use of the ethnographic approach in the composition classroom.

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The Misdirected Letter:
An Argument for Acknowledging Audiences

S.H. Aeschliman

I remember very clearly a serious problem with audience that I encountered when I was in eighth grade. I had been studying French at my middle school and had befriended the teacher, Madame DeKalb. She was my favorite teacher and was so impressed with my ability to pick up the language and my maturity that she asked me to be an aide for her sixth-grade class. I was extremely honored and very appreciative. But after a couple of sessions, I began to notice a cute boy in the class, to whom I finally decided to write a note. My giving him the note, I knew, would communicate my interest, so I chose to use the note as a way of portraying myself in a manner I felt would be acceptable to him. I didn't want him to think that I was a "goodie-goodie" or "brown-noser," despite my being an aide for the class, and I could find no better way of communicating this than by disrespecting Madame DeKalb, calling her "boring" and "silly." The boy was, as I had foreseen, very flattered at receiving a note from an older woman. What I had not anticipated was that he would show the note to his friends in another class, who would carelessly let it fall into the hands of their teacher, who would read it and then give it to Madame DeKalb herself. Madame DeKalb was hurt, of course, by what I'd written about her, and I was thoroughly ashamed of myself for resorting to such pettiness and dishonesty, for risking my friendship with a teacher whom I

loved and respected, all for the sake of attracting the attention of a boy. This was my first lesson in the difference between anticipated and actual audiences, and I have not been able to forget it.

By now it is widely acknowledged by composition and literary theorists that there is a gap between the audience for which a writer writes and the readers who actually read. This gap exists because a writer cannot know for certain which individuals will read his or her work, what mood or frame of mind they will be in when they read, or what past experiences with literature and in life they have had. A writer therefore cannot predict what meaning the readers will make or how the work will affect them. All this is known. What is not known is how, or even whether, the acknowledgment of this gap should affect writers and the teaching of writing. In this essay I will offer descriptions of anticipated and actual audiences, explore a couple of possible solutions to the audience gap that have been offered by other theorists, make the case for why the gap is a problem, and offer some suggestions of my own for how it might affect writers and the teaching of writing.

Anticipated and Actual Audiences

When I sit down to work on an essay, I must, at some point during the process, envision my audience. I may choose, as Peter Elbow suggests in *Writing with Power*, to envision a safe audience or an unsafe one. I may in fact choose to tease out different aspects of the essay by envisioning several audiences: level of background information for my mother, tone for the professors who've trained me to be formal, argument for the classmate who disagreed with me last week, concrete examples for my younger cousins. I may not intend to show my essay to some or even any of these anticipated readers, but I use the idea of these readers to help me flesh out my ideas. Then, once I've figured out what I want to say and how I want to say it, I may go back and revise, this time with my professor in mind, since that's the person who is going to be grading the paper. But all these readers have one thing in common: they are not real. They belong to my *anticipated* audience, and as such, are caricatures of people I know or have known. When I envision my mother as reader, I envision

her as her most open and accepting self; I do not envision her late at night after an emotionally exhausting day, having gotten little sleep the night before. The professor I envision is fresh, alert and open, ready to appreciate what I have done with the time I've had, not tired and crabby after a long day of meetings. Furthermore, my anticipated audience does not include all the people who I never imagined reading my essay. It most likely does not include you, the person reading this right now. It only includes certain aspects of those people I anticipate as readers.

The *actual* audience, the audience I want to write for, is out of reach. First, I can't be certain who my actual audience is. This is what caused the fiasco with the note in French class; I didn't know that Madame DeKalb was to be part of my actual audience. I may write a paper for the professor, and he or she may share it with a partner or colleague. Or I might write an email to my friend, and she might forward it to a friend or two of hers, people I may never have met. Virginia Woolf probably didn't write her journals with the idea that they would someday be published. John Keats probably didn't imagine that his letters would be published, either. I am part of Woolf's and Keats's actual audiences, which they never could have anticipated. Second, even if the essay or letter is read only by the person I envisioned as my anticipated audience, there is still the probability that the actual audience will differ from the anticipated audience. My professor could be tired and distressed instead of calm and rested. He or she might be more familiar or less familiar with my topic than I'd assumed. His or her mind might be preoccupied with the novel he or she has just read. Any of these variables would affect his or her reading, and I have no way of predicting any of them.

Furthermore, I have no control over whether my purpose for writing or the meaning I wish to convey will have the effects I intend. If I write a persuasive essay that fails to persuade the actual audience, can I still call it a persuasive essay? If I include certain information in an essay with the aim of informing the anticipated audience, but an actual reader already has the information, is the essay still informative? If I write a story that deals with a subject I find interesting, but

an actual reader finds boring, is it a bad piece of fiction? In short, if the writing fails to have the effect on its actual audience that the writer anticipated, is it bad writing? Who decides?

Who decides the meaning of the text, for that matter? Recently I heard someone say that when Percy Shelley wrote that poets are the unacknowledged legislators, he meant of words, that poets define a culture's language. I had always assumed that Shelley meant that poets are the unacknowledged legislators of a society's morals. Shelley is not here to tell us which interpretation is right, or whether they both are. Once he sent his text out into the world, he relinquished control over the meaning of his words. If he had been more explicit, he might have succeeded in limiting the meaning of those words, but not of the text. For me, the meaning of a text emerges more fully when I've gone through and marked what I deem to be the important passages and then read back over what I've marked. It simplifies the text and I am able to see connections I missed during the first reading. From that day on, the parts I marked define that text for me. The chances are good that I'll never go back and reread the entire text, but I might go back and quickly read "the important parts." I doubt that what I deem "the important parts" are what the author meant for me to think of as important. I don't go looking for the topic sentence in every paragraph and sometimes I don't even care what the main idea of the essay is if there are other ideas that stimulate my mind. Even a single reader can make multiple meanings of the same text. Whereas the Curious George books used to be about a silly monkey who always got into trouble that the Man in the Yellow Hat had to save him from, I now see lessons about colonization and an individual who has been pulled out of his own culture, forced to adapt to another culture.

But if, as a writer, I have little or no control over who comprises my actual audience, the meaning that will be made of my essay, or the effect my work has on actual readers, why bother to think about audience at all? Why shouldn't I write to please myself? Or why not just use the concept of anticipated audience to trick myself into thinking about my subject from different perspectives?

There's the catch, for my anticipated audience does have

an effect on the way I write and what I write, despite my powerlessness over the actual audience. The level of knowledge I assume determines how much of what kinds of information I include in my essay. The tone of a letter I'd write to my mother would be very different from the tone I'd use in a letter to a senator. The purpose in writing would also affect the content and tone. A letter to my mother would be conversational and informal. I'd tell her about my daily life, my fears and aspirations. But if I wanted to speak up on a political issue in a letter to a senator, I would write formally, distantly, logically, carefully, and as dispassionately as I could manage. I know from my experiences interacting with and talking to people that the odds of reaching my anticipated audience in writing are greater when I approach an issue calmly and rationally. Yet, again, regardless of whom I have in mind and how I write, the actual readers may have reactions very different from those I anticipate. While different anticipated audiences may affect what and how I write differently, there's no guarantee that my writing will have the effects I desire.

Previously Proposed Solutions

Several possible solutions to this dilemma have been offered. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford suggest that writers provide cues to readers, thereby inviting them to share in "a vision" that readers may or may not accept. Similarly, Peter Rabinowitz theorizes that readers can choose to read as though they were closer to the "authorial audience" than they really are. Walter Ong goes even further, claiming that all readers "fictionalize" themselves by taking clues from a text and pretending to have knowledge or experience that they do not have because they want to put themselves in the role of the anticipated audience. As example he gives Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*, and claims that readers pretend to be the companion-in-arms who is intimate with the narrator and to whom the narrator addresses himself. If the actual readers fictionalize themselves, then a writer, by writing for his or her anticipated audience, is, in essence, writing for actual readers. But Ong's theory doesn't work for me. I do not imagine myself as the anticipated reader, as

Hemingway's narrator's companion-in arms. In fact, I do not imagine that Hemingway addresses me at all. He addresses his narrator's companion-in-arms and I get to eavesdrop, because that is the special privilege of the reader. So when I read an essay or a story or a letter, and it becomes clear that the anticipated audience's experiences and information are different from my own, I do not pretend to have knowledge or experiences I do not have. Instead, my attention is drawn to the fact that there is a discrepancy between the anticipated audience and myself, an actual reader. Hemingway does not make me play the role of his anticipated audience; he recognizes the discrepancy between his anticipated audience and any actual readers, and he uses it to his advantage. Instead of pretending to write for his actual audience, he redirects that energy to the audience he *can* write for: in this case, a fictional character on intimate terms with the narrator.

The theories offered by Ede and Lunsford and by Rabinowitz, while seeming more reasonable than Ong's, fall short of a real solution on two main counts. First, while Ong argued that all readers *must* fictionalize themselves, these theories hinge on the idea that readers can *choose* to play the role of anticipated audience or not to play the role. Writers can only offer the role; they cannot make readers accept it. Second, even if a reader does choose to play the role, the reader must first interpret the cues or the role of the anticipated audience. But the reading that leads to the interpretation is subjective and therefore the interpretation will be subjective. A reader can easily miss or misinterpret (i.e. fail to interpret the way the writer intended) cues, and we are back at square one: writers with no control over their actual audiences.

Peter Elbow, in *Writing with Power*, offers a suggestion to writers that would seem at first glance to sidestep the problem entirely: writers should learn to identify the effects certain anticipated audiences have on them and choose an anticipated audience that will help them express themselves to their satisfaction. Here it would seem that the gap between anticipated and actual audiences doesn't matter because writers are encouraged to see the concept of audience as a tool they can use to improve individual pieces of writing. But upon closer examination, it becomes clear that the

problem only seems to be sidestepped here because Elbow, like so many others, fails to mention that the readers a writer envisions will not be the readers who read that writer's work. There is no distinction between the anticipated teacher-audience and the actual teacher-audience, the anticipated safe or unsafe audience and the actual readers. So when a student gets a paper back from the teacher and he or she discovers a multitude of reactions he or she never anticipated, the student concludes that his or her audience analysis skills are lacking. It is true that the student did not accurately construct his or her teacher as audience, but it is also true that he or she *cannot* accurately construct his or her teacher as audience, nor should the student be taught to think he or she can.

The Real Problem

Here is where the real problem lies: a failure to acknowledge the gap leads to unrealistic expectations. The teacher pretends that she is not the actual audience and that she can represent the body of anticipated and actual readers, of which she is only one part. And while the teacher may be able to anticipate some reactions of anticipated readers outside of herself, she cannot speak for all the individuals in her discourse community, much less for those readers outside it. The teacher then proceeds to read the student paper, reacting to it according to her own values, needs, preferences, and experiences, and possibly according to certain criteria or rules she has learned in connection with discipline-specific writing. The comments on the student paper do not reflect the reactions of many readers, whatever the teacher may pretend. All comments are a direct result of the one reader's experiences. Even if the teacher writes that "some professors would prefer that you didn't use 'I' in academic papers," where that is not a value of the teacher who comments, it is still part of that teacher's experience that some professors have that preference.

The student writer must write for her teacher, attempt to anticipate the needs of a "general reader" that does not actually exist, and pretend (or assume) that the other members of the anticipated audience do not have any needs that conflict with the teacher's needs and preferences. In many classes, there is no mul-

tiple drafting or peer response, so the only feedback a student can get on her writing are the comments that accompany the grade. Unless, of course, the student takes it upon herself to request feedback from a friend before the final draft. The student turns the paper in and gets it back, usually with a grade and some comments on it. Those comments will often point out to the student where she failed to correctly anticipate the teacher's needs and preferences, and the student may gradually lose confidence in her abilities as a writer and audience analyst. If, that is, she doesn't realize that everyone fails, that no one turns in a paper that's perfect without a lot of work and multiple rounds of feedback.

What Can Be Done About It

It seems to me that there are at least three easy steps—as well as a couple of more difficult ones—that can be taken to avoid the stickiness of the audience situation. First, I can stop pretending. As a teacher I can only speak for one reader, myself, and as writers students can only write for an anticipated audience. My students and I should recognize that my needs and preferences aren't necessarily in alignment with the needs and preferences of all who might read their work. And it should also be openly acknowledged that my needs and preferences will most likely dictate their grades. By laying these facts out on the table, I give my students a fair chance to succeed. I also allow for more creativity in the creation of audiences. Writers can write for an audience they *can* predict, as Hemingway did, without fear of punishment.

Related to this, there should be discussion among students and professors of writing about the differences between my needs as a reader and my preferences. Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two, but readers' needs tend to apply more to issues of clarity, while readers' preferences usually apply to issues of style. Even though I can't control the meaning a sentence has for readers, readers need to be able to make meaning of the sentence. If the sentence is written in such a way that readers cannot begin to make meaning of it, a need is not being met. On the other hand, I've had professors who've had all kinds of pet peeves when it comes to style. Some don't like a sentence to start

with "and" or "but"; others don't like it when students use "I" in a paper; most don't like to see sentence fragments, even when they don't interfere with clarity. These are preferences, and it is up to me whether or not to consider them. Often, the stakes will determine the extent to which I try to satisfy anticipated readers' preferences. I usually don't alter my style to satisfy professors in order to get a good grade, but I might be more conventional in a letter of application to a doctoral program. It's not that I respect my professor less than the faceless officials, but a grade is not as important to me as is being accepted into a program. (The assumption I would be making, of course, is that the faceless officials would prefer conventionality to my own, natural style.)

Second, teachers can acknowledge the gap and discuss it with students so that realistic expectations can be set and met. Students will no longer expect to one day be able to read the minds of people they've never met. I will not expect them to be able to read my mind. Instead, my students and I will work together to find ways to use the concept of audience as a tool to get at different thoughts and angles on a subject, as a strategy for invention and revision. I can make it clear to my students that the best a writer can do is to make a series of educated guesses about who will read his or her work, and construct an anticipated audience for which to write. And the best way for a writer to make better educated guesses is to have more information about his/her anticipated audience.

Which brings me to my third point: teachers can make room in the syllabus for copious amounts of feedback from actual readers so that students have the opportunity to build more complex and more accurate anticipated audiences through repeated contact with actual readers. The more I write and receive feedback on that writing, the better I become at anticipating audience needs and preferences. Even if an anticipated audience, such as a professor, doesn't match up with the actual, peer audience giving feedback, the peer audience can still point out problems it sees in the writing that might also be problems for the anticipated audience. When I get feedback from actual readers, I have more information about some members of the actual

audience and can fulfill some readers' needs. And the more I am subjected to peer critiquing and multiple drafting, the more adept I become at addressing possible needs before I show the paper to someone else. Furthermore, it has been my experience that most students are not made sufficiently aware of the fact that most, if not all, successful writers request and require feedback before calling it a final draft. These students seem to think (as current traditionalists may indeed have led them to believe) that great writers work in a bubble, writing their masterpieces all at once with little or superficial revision and without reference to anyone's judgment other than their own. But once students have been made aware of the reality, I believe they will be more willing to seek and receive feedback on their work from their peers. They will no longer feel that only bad writers need help revising to make their work more readable. As Ede and Lunsford put it, "the writing process is not complete unless another person, someone other than the writer, reads the text also" (93).

One might also claim that the awareness of a discourse community provides further data for audience analysis, beyond what reactions from individual readers can provide. I agree that it is important to teach students the "secret handshake," if you will, that allows one to pass into the circle of academic discourse. But I also think—and this is where it gets more difficult—that it's important to point out here that the feedback one receives from peer readers and the data for audience analysis that comes from an awareness of a discourse community are two different kinds of information. The former is usually reader-based feedback, while the latter is criterion-based.

Reader-based feedback consists of a person reacting as reader to the text—where he or she got confused or lost, what struck him or her as convincing evidence, or a new and interesting idea. Criterion-based feedback, however, tends to follow certain rules or guidelines. The easiest example is mechanics: comma usage, standardized spelling, complete sentences. But, as Peter Elbow, David Bartholomae, and others have noted, there are other criteria of academic discourse—such as what constitutes valid evidence and how an essay is organized—which students

should be made aware of if they are to succeed in other college classes. Teachers can reveal to students the criteria against which student papers will often be measured, and this knowledge can help students perform better outside the writing classroom.

Discourse community analysis can also help students think about the broader context in which they write by sketching some general characteristics of anticipated readers. If, for example, I write a letter of application to a doctoral program, I will assume that the audience is well-educated, is familiar with the conventions of grammar, punctuation and spelling, and is faced with hundreds of applications. I will assume that I have never met anyone who is to read my letter and that the readers want to know why I am a good match for their program. These assumptions will affect the content and style of the letter: it will be respectful, mechanically correct, creative, and formal, and it will, hopefully, demonstrate my compatibility with their program. I will try to guess what the "official names-without-faces" (Elbow 193) want to hear from me, what will persuade them to accept me. But that job will be made a little easier (in my mind, at least) because I know from experience, and from talking with professors, that graduate committees are made up of people with Ph.D.s who want to know why applicants are a good match for the program at their school. This is the kind of information about members of a particular discourse community that writing teachers can impart to their students to help make audience analysis a little less mysterious.

We must be careful, however, not inadvertently and unquestioningly to perpetuate the status quo. Too often, well-meaning teachers lead their students to believe that the *only* way to succeed, the *only* way to write a paper that persuades their teacher-audience, is to follow the criteria for academic discourse. Many writers, however, have found success precisely because they weren't afraid to experiment with ideas, form, or style. And many great thinkers are considered great because they dared to think critically about conventions and choose for themselves the ones to which they wanted to adhere and those they would fight to change or ignore. If I am to respect my students, I must also en-

courage and respect their capacities to think critically and choose for themselves. They should know that they don't have to adhere to all the style conventions in every circumstance. (Indeed, if they're brave enough and willing to accept the possible consequences, they don't have to adhere to style conventions under any circumstance.) Although it is important for students to remember that they're writing to communicate to other people, it is equally important to remember that they're writing for themselves.

I realize that throughout this essay I may have rather exaggerated the unpredictability of actual readers. The writer is affected, of course, by an anticipated audience and hopefully by feedback from actual readers. But I also fully recognize that the meaning a reader makes is somewhat limited by the words a writer has chosen to put on the page—by the writer's ideas, word choice, and voice. While a reader may not take away from an essay exactly what a writer intended, the reader will take away something that the writer's style and word choice made possible. Ede and Lunsford "hope that [their] model also suggests the integrated, interdependent nature of reading and writing" (92). They mean, I take it from their context, that reading one's own writing, as well as thinking about anticipated readers, affects one's writing. I would go a step further and claim that there is an interdependent relationship between a writer and his or her actual readers, though this relationship is admittedly a very odd one, considering it's a relationship between one person on one side and many people on the other side, and a writer often does not know about the relationship while it is in action (i.e. when the readers are reading). While each reader brings a unique set of experiences and ideas, a unique frame of mind, to the text, each reader is also limited by the same words the writer has chosen to write. Hence, some agreement is possible between readers, even when their individual experiences differ greatly. This is also how readers are able to argue or explain different interpretations of the same text in a way that others can understand it. Words on a page, as words spoken, are a form of communication, which implies common standards of interpretation.

Contrary to what one might think, acknowledging and

talking about the gap between anticipated and actual audiences can increase rather than decrease audience analysis. When students are allowed to commit to specific anticipated audiences instead of trying to write for a non-existent "general reader," they can construct more complex and richer anticipated audiences than they might otherwise. Furthermore, acknowledgment of the gap brings with it an increased awareness of and sensitivity to audiences. I have heard from friends and colleagues examples of instances similar to my French class fiasco: unflattering emails about a colleague or superior that were accidentally sent to the person about whom it was written; a note written by a high school boyfriend inadvertently left out for one's mother to read; a letter put into the wrong envelope when applying to graduate programs. When writers become aware that people may read their work beyond those for whom the work was intended, they may begin to see the wisdom of a saying many of us learned as children: don't say anything about anyone that you wouldn't want them to hear (or in this case, read).

What all this comes down to is increased communication and greater openness about the reality of audience analysis. Instead of ignoring the gap between anticipated and actual audiences and presenting the concept of audience as a simple one, teachers of writing should dialogue with their students about anticipated and actual audiences, readers' needs and preferences, and academic discourse versus reader response. They should remind their students that the students' job as writers is to write for anticipated audiences, to do the best they can with the information they have about their anticipated audiences while actively seeking feedback from actual readers, and not to feel they should be able to anticipate the many possible reactions of teacher-audiences and other actual readers. Above all, writing teachers should take the opportunity to expand their students' horizons and help them understand that there are perspectives different from their own. By acknowledging and encouraging discussion about the paradoxes associated with writing for audiences, students have the opportunity to set realistic goals for themselves and to increase their confidence in their abilities as writers.

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Multicultural Literature in an Honors Classroom

Maria Mikolchak

The past decade has seen much more literature representing various cultures and minorities incorporated in English courses, significantly expanding the traditional English canon (Zahorik). Typically, discussions about teaching multicultural literature assume that students represent several cultures (Webster), and much of the research on teaching in a multicultural classroom presents analyses of the ways students from various cultures react to the same piece of literature.

However, my experience in teaching multicultural literature to an honors class at St. Cloud State University was different. Traditionally, classes at St. Cloud State are very homogeneous, and the honors class that I taught in the fall of 2002 was one hundred percent white, predominantly middle-class students from Minnesota. As a teacher of multicultural literature, I saw this as a great challenge. The level of multicultural awareness of my students was very low, and the similarity in their backgrounds hindered our entering into a productive discussion. Nevertheless, I found the students' exposure to other cultures extremely rewarding. Through literature, they familiarized themselves with several European cultures, including history, economy, and politics. Although the obvious time limitations restricted the thoroughness of such exposure, individual and group assignments allowed the students to get involved on a deeper level with at least two of

the four cultures we discussed in class. Even more importantly, learning about other cultures allowed the students, through comparison, to get a better understanding of their own cultural perspectives. Lastly, this comparison in some cases led to a total revision and reevaluation of ideas that the students never questioned before, to a change in their attitudes and, perhaps, in their lives.

Course Content

This honors course was a literature course giving a cross-cultural view of the Realist novel with the focus on the novel of adultery. Three major European novels-- *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert, *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy, and *Effi Briest* by Theodor Fontane--and one American novel, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, represent the core of the course. The European novels were read in the English translation, although if any of the students had knowledge of one of these languages, they were encouraged to read the novels in the original language (see Hutcheon for a discussion of using translations). In addition to studying literary aspects, much time was allotted to studying the socioeconomic and historical background of the novels, as well as gender construction in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In fact, as Hutcheon argues, it is precisely because of the "increasing importance of feminist theory in North America [that] a major interest in context – social, cultural, historical, political […] – was added to the concern with textuality" (304). The gender aspect was emphasized not only in the discussion of the women's situation during that period but also in the way women and sexuality were represented in literature by male authors compared to the representations of female authors. The goal was to elucidate – with the help of close readings, contemporary reviews, and critical articles – the contested issues of gender.

The course was a discussion course. The students were responsible for two kinds of presentation. For one report, they were expected to recover contemporary as well as more recent evaluations of the work under discussion and present a synopsis of them in an informative and stimulating manner. For the other, the students were to write a position paper taking a

stand on a controversial subject and lead a class discussion. This type of work was aimed at developing critical thinking skills as well as the ability to present an argument in writing.

Analysis of Students' Multicultural Awareness

As a classroom teacher I have been intrigued by how students rework their own culture in processing literature from other countries. Contrary to some generally accepted beliefs, students do not necessarily enjoy literature of their own culture best (Marrouchi). At the same time, early exposure and familiarity with at least one other culture/subculture makes students more receptive to another culture (Webster).

For my analysis of students' reading comprehension and multicultural awareness, I found Banks's *Typology of Ethnic Identity* (1997) especially helpful. In brief, Banks' typology classifies an individual's development of consciousness into six successive stages. In stage one, psychological captivity, an individual possesses a negative feeling of self-evaluation toward one's own ethnic group and a positive view of other ethnicities. In stage two, ethnic encapsulation, an individual possesses a positive view of his/her own ethnic group and a negative view of other ethnic groups. In stage three, identity clarification, an individual identifies strengths and weaknesses of his/her ethnic group and of other ethnic groups. In stage four, biethnicity, an individual understands well and feels positively towards two ethnic groups, moving easily between them. In stage five, multiethnicity, an individual understands several national cultures and feels positively towards all of them. In stage six, an individual understands several cultures on a global scale and feels positively towards other cultures in general.

Banks's typology resulted largely from the Black consciousness movement of the 1960s. Therefore, the first stage, the negative self-evaluation, is not applicable to white middle class Americans, who do not grow up in a culture where their ethnicity is systematically devaluated. Rather, as exemplified by my students, they start at stage two, with a positive view of their own culture and a lack of acceptance of other cultures/

ethnicities. Occasionally, some students are developed enough to see positives and negatives about their own culture and other cultures (stage three). In a classroom with students from other cultures, some students would be at stage four, understanding two cultures, and this would facilitate their movement towards stages five and six. In the homogeneous classroom environment of my honors class, students started at stages two/three.

Overcoming Course Problems

After students tried to master the first chapters of *Madame Bovary* on their own, I noticed their total lack of acceptance of anything different from American culture (the description of the wedding, the ball at Vaubyessard, conversations, to cite just a few). The students who tried their best at interpreting the novel by paying attention to details made observations that showed cultural unawareness in general. For example, one student said that the green eyes of Emma had the color of money. For many, my comment that French money is not green was a total surprise. They had never seen money other than dollars and had never thought that other countries might have money of a different color.

Another complication in understanding the assigned readings was the students' unawareness, even in very general terms, of the material conditions of the nineteenth century (Schultz)[1] Thus, they tended to discard Emma's problems with an easy recommendation to "go get a job." To help the students avoid the trap of applying the norms and standards of contemporary American society indistinctively, several class periods focused on the context in which the novels were written: social, cultural, historical, and political. Students learned that meanings are produced in contexts, without which an accurate reading is impossible. Most of the research students did was on the legal and social attitudes toward marriage in Russia, Germany, France, and the United States in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Catherine Lappas points out, "[a]ddressing cultural diversity

[1] Daniel Schultz and Maryanne Felter address the problem of reading within the historical context in their article "Reading Historically in a Historically Illiterate Culture."

through literary texts is one way, but it is imperative that we create an interdisciplinary critical dialogue as well – literature with social documentaries, autobiographies, reports […]" (167).

For me as a teacher, it was fascinating to see how much more mature students' views and understanding were becoming from one class period to another. For example, the discovery that divorce in France was not legal until the end of the nineteenth century enabled students to stop giving Emma advice to divorce her husband. On the other hand, watching excerpts from a French film version of *Madame Bovary* helped them better understand differences between their own culture and the French culture of that time.

Even more importantly, with this first novel, the students not only got a better understanding of the novel itself, but they also got a general feeling of contextualization in producing a meaning. Thus, reading *Anna Karenina* came much easier. I was surprised how much information the students brought to class at the time I presented the context for *Anna Karenina*. The questions, likewise, were increasingly more informed and the level of irritability with the characters in the novel had substantially decreased. Again, watching parts from a Russian version of *Anna Karenina* and comparing them to the American film added a lot to the discussion of the novel. The reading of the third novel, *Effi Briest*, went even more smoothly. Group presentations on contemporary and modern reviews helped to make subtle distinctions between our modern approach to the novel and its conflict and the approach of the nineteenth-century readers and critics.

The last novel was Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Contrary to my expectations, this was not the easiest reading for the students. My expectations were based on the fact that this is an American novel and we are also getting closer in time to the present day. However, I discovered that entering one's own literature is not necessarily easy. Also, since Kate Chopin is a local colorist and portrays a very specific Creole environment in Louisiana, the setting, although American, created distance. Also, the students apparently were seeking to identify with the main character, but the idea of a woman's sexual awakening and the adultery she commits was met with a lot of resentment and re-

sistance. In adultery they saw a trespassing of morality, religious and societal norms. Interestingly, they could more easily deal with the transgressive character of adultery when it was happening in other countries and other cultures, and was far away in time. The most positive outcome of the heated discussions around *The Awakening* was in the students' attempts to question and understand their own views on contemporary issues.

The final research paper that the students submitted clearly reflected not only their new skills in conducting research into other cultures and carefully choosing sources and documenting them, but the ability to see how cultures, both other and their own, are constructed in society. One further step would be awareness of the constructed nature of the identity in general; hopefully the class made a step in this direction.

An important aspect of the course is my choice of the novels for teaching multiculturalism. The three European novels belong to the world's "great" literature and are often used to promote "the monuments of western heritage" resulting in the neglect of "minor literatures." This is problematic; however, I think that a study of these literary icons can be of much use if we subject "the monuments" to some disturbing deconstructions. In order to resist dominance, we tried to locate the novels within their own cultural space and understand literature as a document as well as monument--in particular a document of female oppression in the patriarchal societies of Western Europe. Of course, there is no single "right" method of handling literary problems, nor a single approach to works of literature that will yield all the significant truths about them. However, considering the historical context and developing students' awareness of it might help develop multicultural awareness in general.

Can one hope to attain the truth? As Virginia Woolf says in *A Room of One's Own*,

> When a subject is highly controversial
> – and any question about sex is that
> – one cannot hope to tell the truth. One
> can only show how one came to hold
> whatever opinions one does hold. One

> can only give one's audience the chance
> of drawing their own conclusions as they
> observe the limitations, the prejudices,
> the idiosyncrasies of the speaker. (100)

This is precisely what I tried to do in my class. Besides teaching the students to understand and appreciate other cultures, I taught them to reevaluate their notions about what they are and who they are and how they came to hold their opinions about other parts of the world and themselves. Rather than accepting their opinions as the norm, the students grasped the idea that norms are formed by society and are, therefore, relative. Talking about American culture and comparing it to the other cultures allowed the students to problematize what had seemed universal truths to them before. Moreover, it led the class to the basic understanding that there is no such thing as "the American culture" since this culture in itself is a curious mixture of multifaceted cultures/heritage.

Assessment and Conclusion

My presentation would have been incomplete without reference to students' overall evaluation of the course:

"I learned a lot about reading literature from other countries. I am more used to reading modern American literature and it is a very different style of reading and analyzing."

"I had never given much thought into the shock value that these books had in the time period they were written. Not only was I able to discover these different styles of writing, but I was also able to learn how society looked at women, marriage and adultery. Through this and writing, I was able to ask myself about what these topics meant to me."

"Much of the information was new to me, mainly the topics on France, Russia and Germany. Class discussions on the countries and their societies were extremely helpful and interesting."

"I learned we are all very different. The presentations you gave really helped a lot in understanding the cultural backgrounds of the different countries and of my own."

"I learned a lot about divorce and legalities of marriage

during this time. The most interesting part was the difference in laws from country to country. I also learned a lot about myself."

Students' evaluations of the class clearly reflect the progress the students made in the development of their critical thinking skills. Most of them address the changes in their attitudes, point out a better ability to understand other cultures and the American culture(s), and attest to the newly developed skills of questioning the established notions of their own culture. The evaluations reflect the personal growth of the students. They also left me with a feeling that teachers should seek to infuse multicultural topics into the regular curriculum whenever possible, and should make them an integral part of teaching in any classroom.

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Alcoholic Tendencies in Faulkner's "Barn Burning"

Karen Wenz

If the purpose of literature is to teach lessons in life, then Faulkner's "Barn Burning" serves an important purpose. "Barn Burning" serves to inspire hope in what would seem a hopeless situation. The reader, identifying with Sarty, will feel the isolation of a young person at a turning point. His parents provide no support or guidance and this aggravates his dilemma—he is torn by the intrinsic bond of blood loyalty and his own objective certainty of right and wrong. Yet he finds the courage to stand alone and make a life-changing decision.

"Barn Burning" has often been examined in the context of its language, its narrative technique, its Southern setting, its time period and its depiction of the patriarchal order in family relationships. Other criticism has focused on Biblical connections and the social order of the post- Civil War era. Faulkner has been recognized as a prolific writer specifically identified with this era and setting. Often a writer weaves threads of truth from his own life experience into the fiction he writes. Faulkner is no exception. His well-documented firsthand experiences with alcoholism apparently influenced his depiction of this family in crisis. While the somewhat masked alcoholic elements of "Barn Burning" have been virtually absent from criticism, the characteristics of alcoholism in this piece warrant an examination of this facet of the story.

"Barn Burning" is a perfect example of the dynamics

of an alcoholic family. The behaviors and scenarios all follow the distinct pattern of a dysfunctional family in distress. The actions of the family members center on the conspiracy of silence that protects the alcoholic. Abner Snopes, the central figure, controls those around him with his cycle of abuse. But Snopes never touches a drop of alcohol. Rather, his liquid of choice is oil—the oil he uses to burn the barns of men who have, in his point of view, wronged or challenged him.

It's as if the tension builds and, rather than going on a drinking binge, Snopes goes on a barn burning rampage. Snopes displays some of the typical traits of an alcoholic. He suffers from low self-esteem, lives in denial that he has a problem, refuses any offers of help, refuses to talk about his problem, and exerts total control over his family, all of whom are bound to him by financial dependence and blood loyalty. His wife and children, in turn, display the traits and habits of the codependents in an alcoholic family. The entire family enters into a conspiracy of silence, so often the norm in the alcoholic household. The dynamics of the family in this short story are too closely related to the dysfunctional alcoholic family for this to be a coincidence.

Snopes himself seems trapped by something he cannot change—his position in life. He resents his more well-to-do neighbors and sees himself as no more than a slave in his sharecropper position. He creates a false world in which he has power—power he derives from the powerlessness he visits upon the men whose barns he burns. His barn burning is like the alcoholic high that is short-lived, though glorious, and is followed by the devastating,, desolate hangover. A vision of the bright, glorious flames portrays the high of the drunk, and the gloomy, charred remains of the barn are like the morning-after hangover. This short-lived sense of power is much like the power an alcoholic feels while under the influence—ten feet tall and bullet-proof—until the alcohol wears off and reality sets in. Snopes has to flee to prevent paying the price for his actions.

Snopes refuses to admit he has any problem—much like the typical alcoholic. The blame for everything, however misguided and preposterous, is always placed on someone

else. When Snopes refuses to take responsibility for his wandering pig, even though his neighbor provides him with the materials to build a fence to keep the pig in his own yard, he is denying that there is any problem—or if there is a problem, it is not his, but rather his unfortunate neighbor's. In exasperation, the neighbor finally holds the pig and demands a fine from Snopes. Snopes retaliates by burning the man's barn to the ground. He is taken to "court" at the local general store, but there is no clear evidence that he burned the barn.

Here the youngest son, Colonel Sartoris ("Sarty") Snopes, sits torn between family loyalty and the sense of justice—an innate sense of right and wrong—where he dreads what he must do. "He aims for me to lie, he [thinks], again with that frantic grief and despair. And I will have to do hit (sic)" (87). Young Sarty is the typical child of an alcoholic, torn between keeping the dreaded family secret and disclosing the truth. The burden is heavy for a ten-year-old child, who in this "courtroom" experiences "the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood" (86). Confronted by a group of men that Sarty views as enemies, both of his father and of himself, it is apparent that Sarty desires a kinship with his father, even a misguided one that pits him and his father against the accusing neighbor, who Sarty well knows is in the right. When Sarty is almost called upon to testify, his heart is in his throat, for he must now make a choice between loyalty to his father and telling what he knows to be the truth. The accuser balks at questioning of a ten-year-old boy, so Snopes is not charged with anything but is advised to leave the area at once, and never return.

Often the children of alcoholics are forced into situations where they must take responsibility for things that should not be expected of ones so young. They in fact must behave like the adult, not only in decision making, but in defending and covering for the alcoholic parent. Children maintain family loyalty but are torn inside—they know the truth, but must hide it from the world. This torment is suffered by Sarty, and Abner Snopes recognizes but exploits it. Snopes realizes that Sarty was about to testify against him. He strikes the boy and lectures him on blood loyalty.

This is typical of an alcoholic—placing blame on others around him, rather than taking responsibility for his own actions. Yet, the nature of the codependent is to look at his or her own behavior and modify it to accommodate the alcoholic. Therefore, Sarty chooses to take this particular beating as a positive sign—his father's beatings have never before been accompanied by explanation. Hoping this signifies a turning point, Sarty lets himself believe that his father has been satisfied by the latest barn burning and will stop now. This is the overly optimistic viewpoint of a child in an alcoholic family— fanciful belief that after the crisis, order will be restored and the beast within will be permanently sated.

The hopeless hope that is experienced by the young Colonel Sartoris is the same as that of any young child of an alcoholic parent—the desperate hope that someday, somehow, the parent will stop drinking. This belief is what leads the codependents in an alcoholic relationship to alter their own behavior to accommodate the alcoholic, with the hope that this will alter the behavior of the alcoholic. The problem is that the alcoholic remains in control—the actions and behaviors of the alcoholic determine the actions and behaviors of the codependents. Nevertheless, the codependents hold firmly to the desire for a new future, and focus on the silent hope that this time will be the last time. When the Snopes family moves once again, the family members have a renewed hope that they are leaving the past behind and starting anew. However, they come to realize, as all families of alcoholics must at some point, that the behavior and the patterns of living follow a family from new home to new home. Behaviors and habits are not left behind in the physical home, but journey with the family to create new horrors in a new home.

Upon arrival at their new sharecropper's house, Snopes and Sarty walk to the mansion of the new boss, Major de Spain. The private hopes that Sarty holds are heightened when he sees the grandeur of the new boss's magnificent home. Surely his father will not dare to defile this man's property. Surely he will be changed "from what maybe he couldn't help but be" (94). But Sarty sees trouble immediately when his father deliberately steps in fresh horse droppings on the property, rather than

simply sidestepping the mess. He walks on and steps into the luxurious home, leaving footprints of fresh horse droppings on an expensive rug in the entryway. He does this despite the warning from the butler, despite the outcries from Mrs. de Spain. Snopes simply turns on his heel, grinding the horse manure into the rug and smearing it across an even larger area. Snopes is demonstrating his contempt for the owner of the home and the rug. He sees himself as no more than a slave to the de Spains, but flaunts his supposed power over them by ruining their rug.

Sarty has now seen a deliberate act by his father—Snopes is obviously inventing a situation that will justify (at least in his mind) burning de Spain's barn. De Spain brings the rug to Snopes, demanding that he clean the rug and return it. True to form, Snopes orders the women to clean the rug, failing to take responsibility for his deliberate defiling of it. The women, clearly out of their element, have no idea how to clean a fine rug, and manage only to ruin it further with their attempts at removing the horse manure stains. Nevertheless, Snopes returns the rug, noisily dumping it on the porch of de Spain's home in the middle of the night.

De Spain is outraged, not only at the blatant disregard Snopes shows for his property, but at the audacity of Snopes' attempt to sue de Spain! De Spain had insisted that Snopes repay him for the $100 rug. He acknowledged, "It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had a hundred dollars. You never will. So I'm going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your crop" (99). De Spain goes on to lay out the terms of the repayment, but is shocked to find that Snopes brings de Spain to court, claiming that the price he is exacting for the rug is too high. The court finds against Snopes, but reduces the amount he must repay. Of course, Snopes is not satisfied with this, and immediately makes plans to burn de Spain's barn.

Snopes orders Sarty to fetch a barrel of oil. Sarty runs off to do his father's bidding, but his heart is racing and he engages in a verbal battle within himself, torn still by blood loyalty and the dread of what is to come next. Sarty's older brother is clearly ready to follow in his father's footsteps without question, and willingly prepares the oil to start the barn on fire, but

Sarty has reached a decision point, and can not be restrained. He will not stand by and watch his father burn another barn and his father knows it, so Snopes orders his wife to hold Sarty back so he can't run off to warn the de Spains. Despite her pleas for him to stop, Snopes is off to set fire to the barn. Sarty soon breaks free from his mother's grasp and rushes to warn de Spain, but he is too late. The barn is already in flames.

That young Sarty found the courage to confront the demons is remarkable. There is often one person in an alcoholic family who will stand up and dare to say what no one else will say—the truth. That one who breaks free becomes the alien—for he no longer belongs with the codependents and the enablers. While the others may admire him, they lack his bravery, and simply return to the comfort of the familiar, yet desolate, existence with the alcoholic. As for the brave young ones who break away, as Sarty does, they must do as he did, and never look back.

This critical examination of "Barn Burning" lends itself to discussion along several avenues. It is certainly a "coming of age" story where students can identify with the awakening of their own ideals, which may be in conflict with the ideals of their parents. It also serves to assure students that if their own family lives are less than perfect, they are not alone. The secrecy and conspiracy of silence that is often the norm in an alcoholic family can be broached and when the truth is revealed, there can be a sense of relief rather than shame. Sarty separates himself from the secret, vows to no longer take part in the conspiracy and denial, and becomes his own person as a result.

The example of this young boy, still far from manhood, can give other young students the courage to make decisions to save themselves from similar lives of certain misery. Yet this example is not reserved for the young—many adult children of alcoholics face the same demons. They, too, need to find the courage to break free from the pattern of helplessness and hopelessness. Sarty's courage serves as an inspiration to children (of any age) that they are not destined to follow in the paths of their parents when those paths lead to destruction, but that they can forge new paths for themselves that lead to hope and fulfillment rather than ruin and despair.

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Ghosts, Madness, and the Wall in the Hall:
Assisting Students to Find Their "Hamlets" in *Hamlet*

William D. Dyer and Scott Hall

I. Introduction—Dyer

Hamlet. The character and the play. That most seductive and frustrating of literary experiences. The subject of endless theses. The theatrical apple that every truly talented and versatile virtuoso of an actor cannot resist biting into in order to establish his set of indisputable acting credentials. The object of analysis by the *creme de la creme* of literary critics whose formulations diverge wildly from each other. And, what's most important to us, the imposing obstacle that we, and many other teachers of English at the high school and university level, place squarely in the path of our students.

Students can make book on the certainty of impressment as a captive audience to Hamlet, and *Hamlet*, as early as the sophomore year of high school. We were. And, since I am a full generation older than my partner Hall, and because I first met him as a student in one of my Shakespeare classes, I had actually held *him* captive to Hamlet! The two of us have taught Hamlet a combined total of well over forty years, and, for most of those years, it's fair to say that we did some variation of telling classrooms full of students what we thought was important about the character and the play, how we thought they should think about it, and how it was essential that they lick their plates of the banquet of wisdom we'd force-fed them in order to become truly educated young people.

It's taken us some considerable time and effort to realize that our former approach (and not just *ours*, but virtually every wrong-headed pedagogical purveyor of pearls before swine)—however well-meaning—was deeply flawed. We continue to be convinced that introducing our students to the texts of Hamlet—both the character and the play—is as important an enterprise as we could pursue. It's all about *them*. But, then, it's all about *us*, too. We are truly in there. Engaging students in the text of the character and the play Hamlet always should result—if we as teachers are entirely respectful of Shakespeare's language and our students—in their accessing their own rough, personal, substantially unfinished, and sometimes very fragile texts. And, in order for that engagement to be staged most effectively and productively, we've opted these past several years to jettison our canned notes and conclusions and exam questions about what WE think Shakespeare's play is about and the "outcomes" our students should be led toward (no child's behind left behind) in favor of carefully framed questions to facilitate our and our students' inquiry. Because, as we've understood for a long time, we don't have the definitive answers to this character and play.

In fact, both Hamlets—the character and play—are all about questions. And it's not just "to be or not to be." Shakespeare has intentionally stacked the deck from the very beginning of the play against the possibility of a careful reader being able to confirm in it the existence of any definitive and discoverable truth. No certainties, abstract or concrete. Pretty much like our students' contemporary world. And, just like our students' world, Shakespeare has surrounded Hamlet with characters who seek aggressively to impose their own fairly subjective and prejudicial constructions of reality on him. Very similar to a contemporary election campaign. By the time our students have taken a seat in one of our classes, they, like Hamlet, have become accustomed to being told what's right, what's important, what's true, what's good, and what's evil—and, for them and Hamlet, those definitions and explanations are often riddled with contradictions.

So, for us, teaching the text of Hamlet—the character and the play—is no longer about what's true. Instead, it's all

about training students to think independently. That process requires that they use what they know in order to begin to navigate a textual world that they don't know. It's about participating with them in understanding what a text is, how to "read" a text, and realizing that, in the act of "reading" a text—no matter how many times they may read it—they re-create it. Reading, from our perspective (whether that act of reading involves a literary text or a small wave rippling across the surface of Lake Superior), involves an act of authorship. We become Hamlet and radically re-make the play with each new encounter with it. The sum of our life experiences and our reactions to and feelings about those experiences condition what we see and how we see it in *Hamlet*.

And each new experience must necessarily alter the way we see and re-assemble the character and play of Hamlet into a new configuration. Toward that end, we intend to share a little of our most recent experience of helping our students to see *Hamlet* for themselves by focusing briefly on only three of the many textual possibilities in the play—ghosts, madness, and what we've come to call "the wall in the hall." We offer no exclusive or crypt-unsealing answers, but, instead, a few questions located around the issue of "text" within the text of Hamlet. Will this scrutiny of "text" be a post-mortem? An autopsy? Only partly, and not at all without the aid of our students who must take up their spades as fellow gravediggers in this endeavor. The *corpus delecti* is still warm, if not actually breathing, thanks to Kenneth Branagh's projection of his own reader response to the play.[1]

II: The Tools of the Enterprise—The Ghost Is Text—Hall

In fact, both of us are indebted to Branagh's filmed version of the play for the text-within-the-text that serves as the hub around which the wheel of the play and the character of Hamlet spin: Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy in 3.1.[2] When the

[1]Kenneth Branagh, "William Shakespeare's '*Hamlet*'" (video-recording), prod. David Barron (Castle Rock Entertainment, 2000).

[2] "William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), 1160. All subsequent references to this play are referenced to this text.

two of us joined forces in front of my twelfth-grade English literature class last spring, it was with Dyer's understanding that the class had already sat through a full viewing of Branagh's re-creation of the play. The text that Branagh has invited us and those students to read with him is rich and intriguing: the wide, empty, and mirrored hall that Hamlet enters so intentionally; the very self-conscious approach of Hamlet to one of those mirrors; the presentation values of carriage, posture, eye contact that Hamlet brings to that mirror; the careful delivery of the text of the speech itself, as if this were a calculated performance or, at the very least, a dress rehearsal for one; the reception of that performance and text by—what or whom? Of course, by the time we and our students viewed 3.1 for the second time, we knew that Polonius and Claudius have sequestered themselves behind that two-way mirror, either to see while not being seen, or, because of the power of Hamlet's performance, to be convinced that Hamlet sees them and is carrying his performance to a special audience of two. But Branagh has left another possibility available to us—that Hamlet is the subject, object, and vehicle of his soliloquy.

It was at this point that we determined to turn away from Branagh's screen for a few moments and puzzle with our students about what could possibly be meant by the term "text." When we ask our own students to respond to a "text," we mean more than just the lines of *Hamlet*. We mean more than just the other written material which informs readers, such as the stage directions, the introduction to the edition of the text that we may be using, or any other primary source material printed in the book itself. The word "text, " as Dyer and I use it, can also be:

- Any previously learned facts, cultural values, morals, understandings, experiences, opinions, beliefs, or attitudes which readers bring to the play and flavor its meaning;
- Any sources such as drawings, paintings, photographs, film, sculpture or multi-media which serve to broaden our view of the primary material;
- Any understanding, possibility, meaning or ideas developed as part of their experience with primary or secondary materials;

- Any new learning brought about by sharing ideas, opinions, journals, or pictures or any other texts through writing or discussion with other students of Hamlet (I now consider myself only a student of Hamlet, never a teacher of the character or play)

Using this definition, texts can include the First Folio of Hamlet as well as a cartoon or comic book recreation of the play. A discussion with a colleague or a student can be studied as a text, as can a piece of late sixteenth-century miniaturist cameo painting (actually, Nicholas Hilliard's work represents a text that students can immediately and profitably juxtapose to Hamlet's tirade against mom in 3.4). And there are many other texts within *Hamlet* such as Hamlet's letters to Ophelia, Polonius' advice to his children, and Claudius' speech to the court.

But, then, there were our own experiential understandings of "text——its "fictional" nature; the variety of shapes in which they come to us (greeting card; novel; letter; passport; art work; photograph; a young mother's nurturing gaze or breast, or the expression on anyone's face, for that matter; the particular costume one wears or the idiosyncratic gestures and body language that accompany that costume; a favorite song; one's staging of an important event, such as a burial or marriage; one's attempt to rehearse or remember the elements of a classical philosophical argument or speech or previously memorized lines from a play; a eulogy; a contemporary clinical text on mental health; the text of a trial or inquest; the invention of a play script, regardless of whether that play contains actual dialogue, as well as the facial and gesticular reaction to such a play by a portion of its audience; the textual outcome of foreign ambassadorial parleys; the "reading" by a second and observing party of what appears to be a submissive and prayerful act of remorse and contrition and confession; the comparative human features of two different people etched upon two cameos; our own autobiographical texts-in-progress, still under construction)—all of these textual possibilities, each of them "stories" in their own separate ways, relentlessly drive the play and condition, to some extent, our and our students' view of Hamlet and Hamlet's view of his environment and those in it.

Interestingly, many of our impressions radiated around the idea that many if not most of the "story" texts in the play seem to relate to burial, death, the ghosts of those who've died, and what may lie beyond the borders of the phenomenological world. The story texts that relate to Hamlet the character seem to operate in a number of ways: (1) some are counseling him (others are being counseled so, like Ophelia and Laertes) to remain inside of himself, buried, and not to come out, to repress and withdraw himself (note how the Graveyard scene deals with the decomposing process, the de-selfing of the individual); (2) others carry an easy prescription for who Hamlet is and what's wrong with him and what it'll take to fix him, as if he were a broken piece of video equipment; (3) texts help Hamlet sort out and re-order a very confusing and corrupt situation—he seems to behave much more comfortably (if not euphorically) in the world of a stable text than in a world without one (he spends a lot of time prescribing theatrical roles for himself and responding to his world within some of those roles); and (4) texts that are designed as templates (boiler plate) for the person he is told he *must* be (i.e., his father, a revenger, a dutiful and obedient son, a chip off the martial block) or recommendations for the person he should be on the basis of the situation in which that text is being enacted (i.e., anything having to do with Fortinbras in this play, but especially 4.4).

Film representations of Hamlet are texts which can equally be studied. Because Dyer and I employ strategies culled from both reader response and structuralist criticism[3], we believe that Branagh's film models perfectly the skills we want our students to learn. Branagh merely does to Shakespeare what we want our students to replicate with Shakespeare: read, analyze, interpret, discuss, critique. Kenneth Branagh's version of Hamlet, released in 1996, can be viewed independently from or as an adaptation of

[3] We borrowed liberally from the work done by reader-response critics Norman Holland –"Hamlet: My Greatest Creation, *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*,' ed. Charles E. Bressler, 2nd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1999), 80-86)—, Stanley Fish—*Is There a Text in This Class* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1980)—, and David Bleich—(*Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism)* (Urbana: NCTE, 1975), whose works are most concerned with the reader's

Shakespeare's written text, studied as a primary or a secondary text, as a unique, new interpretation or a retelling of an old classic. .

Branagh's film operates as both a reader-response approach to the play and as a secondary source, which serves to increase our understanding of the original texts within his filmic response to the play. His directorial preparation for creating the film mirrors my students' attempts at reading the play. Branagh has had to examine every textual possibility and make meaning from his own understanding, interpretations, and beliefs about Shakespeare's text. In creating these possibilities, Branagh then verifies or defends these imaginative possibilities against the rest of the play. If Ophelia has been physically intimate with Hamlet, as Branagh shows us in a flashback, how does that change for her (and for us) the meaning of Polonius' strict orders to reject Hamlet's affections, or flavor her actions in the nunnery scene? How do Branagh's decisions inform Hamlet's behavior towards her? Also, what insight does their intimacy provide on Ophelia's madness? Why is pity evoked when Gertrude tells us of her death? The heat of a sexual relationship between Hamlet and Ophelia infuses these scenes with a different, raw emotional power, bringing a higher level of coherence and lucidity to the ensuing madness than I had ever considered before viewing Branagh's film.

Branagh has had to make other, similar decisions concerning the text as he brings the lines off the page and into the film. In a flashback we see Yorick, King Hamlet's jester, alive and proudly carrying the pre-adolescent Hamlet high on his shoulders. Branagh also inserts cutaways and voice-overs to make each line fit his interpretation of Hamlet. Film enables these dimensional refinements. For example, we can view the graveyard scene in a new way: Branagh's gravedigger (who will henceforth be identified as Billy Crystal) presents to Ham-

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experience and individualized role within the text. My own study—"Thinking Makes It So: Examining Textual Possibilities in William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* through Reader Response," M.A. Thesis (Minnesota State University, Mankato: 2000—applies this idea of text to Shakespeare's Hamlet. We also borrowed heavily from some of the structuralist work of Robert Scholes—*Semiotics and Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982) and *Textual Power: Literary Theory and the Teaching of English* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1985).

let a human skull ("Whose do you think it is?") with the pronounced overbite seemingly identical with Hamlet's speculative flashback of the jester. In this case, Branagh may or may not be (to be or not to be?) intending us to take the skull that Billy Crystal holds up as truly Yorick's; Hamlet's imagination makes exactly that nostalgic identification, which plunges him into a sentimental sinkhole. My reason for showing this (or any) film version is to present my students with an alternative text, and we study the film (or pieces of it) as we would study a written text. But Branagh's film, in its completeness, is special in inviting my students to do what he has had to do—to become Hamlet in the process of becoming better readers and responders.

If we understand the literary criticism of Stanley Fish[4], we know that readers respond to literature in many ways. Readers bring their previous knowledge and experiences into the text with them. They rely upon their understanding of what words mean in order to decode a text's sentences. *How* a text means to readers is more a matter of culture than what a text means. Words, such as "cool", can be understood literally or in a cultural context. A refreshing drink, especially when served on a hot day at the beach, is often *cool*. However, The Fonz, even in the stifling Milwaukee summer heat, is also cool—very cool. So, culture and experience (such as even knowing of The Fonz) may cause me to decode a written text in an individual way—I create a unique meaning, specific to my own experience, even though the play may have been purposefully taught to furnish general information for a multiple choice/true or false test. Even if I only read for content, my experience will be different than anyone else's.

David Bleich,[5] building upon the work of Fish, writes specifically about the dynamics of groups who study the same

[4] Fish's *Is There a Text in This Class?* explains his position with several examples to demonstrate that virtually anything can be a text, as well as carrying meaning as a text does.

[5] Bleich's *Subjective Criticism* clearly outlines the ability of groups to enact new meaning about a text through discussion and debate. His focus on interpretive communities is a cornerstone upon which my opinion of the importance of group discussion in the classroom is based.

texts. Groups often create and establish unique meanings, apart from the text, through their discussion of their impressions and understandings about the text. These interpretive communities establish a knowledge base and terminology, body language and rhetoric. Such jargon as "take out your notebook" or "good morning" means something very specific to my class. Students understand that "good morning" means "shut up—class is about to begin—it's my turn to speak. They should start listening to me *now."* Before I press the "play" button on the VCR or ask them to open their Hamlet texts, I spend time making sure that students are all members of the interpretive community called "Honors British Literature." I must make certain that we share a common lexicon and we know how to operate within the structure of our classroom/community. Daily, we practice the skills necessary for interpretation and communication.

Even as members of the same interpretive community, students continue to make their own meaning, independent of one another, as they read the play. When students write journals about their responses to the play, they revisit these original conceptions and recreate meaning. When they discuss their conceptions in class and receive input from others, they again re-make meaning based upon the texts (Hamlet, journals, other assignments, etc.) which they have created along the way. When they watch Branagh's version of the play, they rebuild their understandings of the written text yet again. Through a variety of experiences (unique comparisons, contrasts, perhaps even mistakes in their reading), students' readings of the play are continually challenged and recreated. One student may understand Ophelia differently because her parents run her life. Another may understand Hamlet differently because he is struggling with depression. Yet another may understand Claudius' confession in the church differently because she is Catholic. The experiences students bring to Hamlet cannot be divorced from the present experience of reading Hamlet.

Likewise, Robert Scholes' approach[6] also provides a ve-

[6]Scholes' *Textual Power* is a valuable source for classroom teachers. Much of his text explicates Hemingway's *In Our Time* but is immediately, and appropriately, applicable to any literary work.

hicle for transporting student responses from the private experience of reading the text to the public experience of classroom interaction. Student experiences drive classroom discussion to a higher level if we move some of the tenets of structuralism under the umbrella of reader response. Structuralists argue that we interpret meaning through a system of binary opposites. We understand perfectly the word "right" when we know that it means "not left." We can also understand "right" if we know it means "not wrong." Often, the only way we can understand a word's meaning is when we define its opposite or its unique "otherness." The system of binary opposites provides us a tool to work with in the classroom. For instance, we might ask questions like the following as we read Hamlet: Is Hamlet young or old? Is he sane or mad? Is Ophelia independent or dependent on Hamlet? Does she obey or rebel against her father's wishes? As we read, we often invoke these systems to make meaning. If Hamlet is not mad, then he must be the "other"—sane. If Ophelia is not *rebelling*, then she must be obeying her father. Binary opposites become our second sight as we read.

In much the same way we define ourselves through binary opposites. We identify the otherness in us which distinguishes our individuality. Because I am male, I should provide for my family. Because I am a man, I don't cry. Because I am female, I talk about my emotions. Because I am female, I am expected to stay home and be the mother of my children. We do not separate these oppositions as we read the play. The way we imagine others—i.e., Hamlet or Ophelia or our neighbors next door—is affected by the way we imagine ourselves. We do not conjure "ghosts" which are alien to our preconceptions. We only understand what "is" to the degree that we understand what "is not"—the otherness in the binary system.

So, before I press "play" on my VCR and show my students Branagh's version of the text, how do I move them toward a deeper understanding of this process of making meaning? How can I prepare students to be creative receivers of Hamlet? How do I prepare them to *become* Hamlet or Ophelia? How do I prepare myself? First of all, I ditch my old or current

class notes and pat answers about what this play is. Students find no joy, no discovery, no immediacy, no genuine spontaneity in those answers that I think I have: I'll be lucky to impress one student with all my hard work and study. The meaning of Hamlet cannot be captured on paper and stored in a manila folder. Hamlet is alive! The target of Hamlet's identity is ever growing, ever changing, because we are growing and changing. Shred that multiple choice test, too. Though my questions and answers might be important to me, they may not be the ones that most enable my students to create an intensely personal and individual understanding of the play. My issues should not have to be their issues. Successful readers should think for themselves.

Next, find ways to get students to interact with the text and with each other. Instead of asking students to focus on answers (the "m. o." of the study guide), *let students ask the questions*. How else can we get at the "ghosts" that students carry with them into the text? How else can we get students to recognize and evaluate their own ghosts? If we don't value their ghosts, how can we get their ghosts to interact and "talk" with the ghosts in the play? And those ghosts are texts of enormous import—texts which can be studied just as seriously as the play itself. After all, we'll continue to carry these ghosts long after we set the text of the play aside. These ghosts are the sum and substance of *our* education. We will learn to listen to, befriend, control, and, finally, *become* our ghosts.

Norman Holland writes that he re-creates Hamlet each time he reads it ("Hamlet: My Greatest Creation" 80-1). In this way, Holland actually becomes the creator of the play. And that is what we intend, in some significant way, for our students.

As Dyer and I continued to talk about Hamlet with our students, we found the critical schools of reader response and structuralism valuable as tools to open up the texts in Hamlet. These tools are both critical and practical: critical in that we can apply some degree off consistency to our reading, and practical in that our students can also use these tools with some efficiency. We do not pretend to know everything there is to know about the play or its welter of texts. In fact, we continually discover a new

text that alters with every interaction (unlike sonnet #116—"That alters not when it alteration finds…"). Also, the number of texts we find in the play is limited only by our own knowledge and resourcefulness—that is, what we are able to draw from Shakespeare's text at any given time in our lives. And, like us, students find their own texts within these plays wholly independent of our knowledge of life, the play, or the interaction between the two. This is the crux of our belief: that students can find greater meaning and substance in the play when they learn to ask good questions rather than regurgitating "right answers" that, in most cases, prompt them to rehearse the answers we've given them, dependent wholly on our teaching and understanding of the play and limited by our relative knowledge of traditions associated with the play, our lack of preparation, curricular inflexibility, and the relative rigidity of classroom goals and outcomes.

I had prepared my class with the foundations of reader response and structuralism before Dyer arrived and had tested their understanding of how it worked on the first two acts of the play prior to his joining our discussions. And they were ready for him as we watched 3.1 together. Working into the our discussion of the scene and all that had led up to it were a couple of student observations—we seconded them—that a kind of premature burial seemed to be in the process of being performed on Hamlet (i.e., it is *he* who is the ghost who has been stumbling around in the world of the play, looking for someone who will excavate and exhume his authentic voice). And more than a few students averred that Hamlet was the *real* ghost here, not Dad, and his being was deeply buried. Most of that's not his fault—we're dealing with victimology here, and several students were quick to express that. People in Elsinore simply aren't allowed to "be"—the whole 3.1 soliloquy, one astute student suggested, was a moot point, a red herring, one among many implanted by Shakespeare. There is no "to be or not to be" for Hamlet, not in the world of *this* play. And a study of the "to be" text, with some intentional connections to other related story-texts that drive the play and Hamlet and Hamlet's character, indicate that Hamlet's own text can't really be composed

here, or, perhaps, that the text that his culture really celebrates, and has already begun to decompose, is death, in so many ways.

However, when we *saw* him in 3.1, several students were quick to note a virtual mirror of the appearance of the ghost in 1.1. This, they concluded, was a ghost of the ghost of his father that Claudius and Polonius are observing. They're terrified, but there's an added irony here. In a society in which "performance" is so important, they're reading the performance for the real thing. Hamlet's rehearsing a role he'd like to play, but he doesn't have any more than the lines or the pose and the conventions of it down yet. His self is still inside and deeply buried, and will remain so until the Graveyard scene when, ironically again, it will emerge from the grave by leaping into and embracing it, if only temporarily.

III. The Wall in the Hall—Dyer

At this point, I shared with Scott's class a story of a set of circumstances I'd observed just recently in the halls of the university at which I teach. I wanted to know if our students had encountered a similar experience in the halls of Irondale High School and whether what they and I had seen might shed any light on the way Branagh had blocked and staged 3.1. Because the Speech Department at that university fields and coaches a highly regarded forensic and speech team and conducts a number of state-wide competitions in the same building where our classes our conducted, I've had occasion to watch scores of young people preparing themselves for competition in a manner in which, I'm told, Speech faculty have counseled them to rehearse. One afternoon, as I meandered toward the English Department office, I was confronted with the backs of several extremely well-dressed male and female contestants engaging the wall in front of them in passionate address. One blue-suited young man, his face no more than a few inches from the wall, was delivering an oral interpretation of a memorized piece of literature with appropriate vocal modulations and body language to support it. As I walked toward the office, I was able to view a number of other speech tournament contestants similarly rehearsing to the wall in the hall, each one absolutely oblivious to me or other hall traffic, so intent upon honing their presenta-

tion skills for the performance that would soon unfold before a live audience of their fellow contestants and contest judges.

It occurred to me that, if I were to close my eyes for a moment, I might be fooled into believing (theatre is, after all, about encouraging an audience's willed suspension of disbelief) that these performances were actually underway before an audience rapt in attention. But I knew better. No matter how effectively each of these students conducted him or herself in that rehearsal, a major element of the performance was missing—the audience. Or, to be more precise, the audience that each student was addressing, such as it was, was (1) an inanimate object incapable of responding (the phrase "sounding board would only ironically apply here) or (2) the self. And there it was—a totally self-referential performance to an audience of one, perhaps the most critical and demanding of all audiences but one that we often use to serve as "gatekeeper" before our performances are approved to "go public."

I told the class that this experience—even my reflective "performance" for them of this highly self-conscious and artificial speech tournament phenomenon—was somewhat unhinging since I realized that I've performed this ritual before countless public performances: the recitation of a poem that I've had to memorize, the most important one being at the wedding of my daughter; the polishing of a very important part of a lecture I've been preparing; my fevered rehearsal of the lines that I'll deliver in a skit or role-play as part of a faculty development workshop; the careful mental construction of a speech I've had to submit my son to as part of a parental act of discipline; my practicing, before a mirror while shaving, of responses to questions that I'm certain I'll be asked during an important job interview that will begin shortly (to be or not to be [employed], that is the question).

The students I'd been sharing these thoughts with had seen a version of what I'd seen and indicated very similar reactions. And they also seemed very willing to engage a connection between the common experience we'd had with speech tournament rehearsings and what Hamlet was doing in Branagh's recreation of the 3.1. We noted that Branagh's filmed version of

that scene—in fact, his entire filmic production of Hamlet—is a recreation of the original text. Lest we become lulled into the apparent banality of that observation, we need to remember (a word that reverberates like a bell from beginning to end of *Hamlet*) that, besides representing an entirely new text of Hamlet that has resulted from Branagh's reader-response to the play, it carries reader-response one radical step further: in his "reading" of Hamlet, the play and "Hamlet" the character, Branagh not only becomes that character by inscribing his own interpretation and experience upon him but literally (no pun intended) becomes Hamlet by assuming his role, donning his clothes, and intoning his lines. But he takes "being" Hamlet a step still further: just as Hamlet seems most comfortable while operating within a theatricalized and blocked environment in which his role is clear and his lines are prescribed and stable, with all of the attendant and obsessive micromanaging of things theatrical such as recruiting an acting company (Holy Charlton Heston, Batman! Our students told us much more about the "theatrical" penchant of Hamlet than we'd ever expected), writing and casting of scenes, assigning parts and managing actors' rehearsal of their parts, intentionally organizing portions of the play space, directing and producing the play, Branagh has used his considerable talents to perform all of these theatrical functions as well. He IS Hamlet—he's conceived a Hamlet that has never been before, and he is the author of Hamlet's internal as well as external world. He'd accomplished the very act of authorship that we'd entrusted so hopefully to our students.

That's why it's so intriguing to view the peculiar projection of *him*, Branagh/Hamlet—that Hamlet and that world—in 3.1. What we, and our students, saw was not at all what some of us expected to see. In a highly theatrical way, a very neatly coiffed and attired Hamlet/Branagh enters an intentionally artificial and stylized "stage"—an empty and circular and high-ceilinged hall, the walls of which are completely mirrored. As Hamlet's measured and confident footfalls echo off the broad emptiness of this hall of mirrors, he calculatedly walks to a specific mirrored segment of the wall. After meeting his own gaze,

arranging his appearance, and taking a moment to summon the resources of a breath, his concentration, and a very erect and ready posture ("readiness is all"), Hamlet/Branagh begins to recite the "to be or not to be, that is the question/Whether it is nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortunes, …to take arms against a sea of troubles and, by opposing, end them…ah, there's the rub" soliloquy without ever breaking eye contact with himself. That unwavering gaze is remarkable enough, given the length of the speech; however, more remarkable, from Branagh's reconstruction of his (Hamlet's) text of the speech, is the degree to which his "performance" of Hamlet's "performance" seems like a performance—the careful entrance, the "stage" of the great hall in which he becomes the incontrovertible object of attention by virtue of the reflective and self-referential mirrors, the costume, the physical posture and carriage, the anticipation-building pause before the recitation, the measured and carefully modulated delivery.

This package of performance values began to seem more apposite when we considered the text of the performance. Among the many things the soliloquy *could* be, it reads like an intellectual exercise, perhaps one of many such dialectical disquisitions Hamlet (and Horatio as well) may have had to learn, memorize, and deliver as part of his scholastic training at Wittenberg U. to a hall of students and instructors and then even be "graded" on the quality of his presentation. Rhetoric and argumentation on abstract subjects, as well as the ability to see oneself on either side of a complex philosophical argument, would have represented a large portion of Hamlet's university training. Branagh's Hamlet delivers the text of the speech with the confidence that comes from *knowing* it, the argument, and how to deliver it. Branagh's Hamlet reads it as virtually a set-piece, an exercise, a rehearsal of something already learned and familiar. There may be something comfortable in recalling and rehearsing the lines of an argument whose geography and language he has already mastered—like the lines from a play that has been particularly impactful, and unlike his current predicament.

All that's missing to make the performance complete is

an audience. But *is* it absent? Not entirely. Clearly (to the director Branagh/Hamlet if not to Branagh's Hamlet), Polonius and Claudius have ensconced themselves on the other side of the two-way mirror to which Hamlet is delivering his text. And, it appears, they have been moved so much by Branagh/Hamlet's performance of the text that their reasoned belief in their invisibility as audience to the performance they're viewing has been suspended—for them, the two-way mirror works for Hamlet as well as for them. Suddenly, the fourth wall has lowered; so effective is Branagh/Hamlet's delivery that they believe themselves the object of it and him, visible actors on his stage. But, just like that student whom both I and our students have experienced pressing his face up against the wall in nervous and focused rehearsal for the soon-to-be-real performance to a room full of students and tournament judges, Branagh/Hamlet is his own audience—perhaps the subject, the object, as well as the audience of his performance.

What did we and our students take from this? The issue of still life, a play all about death, a rehearsal for the graveyard scene (a hunch played by one of our students), for this is a graveyard, the only sure means and mode and medium of communication and identity and order and self. Life, as Branagh has envisioned it for himself and for us, is a hall of mirrors. Everyone wants to hold and vivisect and define and manage Hamlet, it seems.

IV: Madness, or Pogo's "We have met the enemy, and it is us"—Hall and Dyer

But what might the idea of "madness" have to do with *Hamlet*, Hamlet, us, and the ability of any of us—students, teachers, teachers aspiring shamelessly to be students—to see ourselves in the characters and environments of Shakespeare's play? Well, as Scott's students were quick to point out, just about everything. It didn't take any time at all for the inexplicable horrors of "9-11" to occur to us along with the recollection ("Remember me…") most of us had of being passive, helpless viewers of televised images, the endless re-playing (most of couldn't tear ourselves away from the screen, no matter how much pain they caused us) of those acts of senseless human carnage. Absolute

insanity. And some might say, although we didn't then, that the fog of insanity of that day, rather than eventually dissipating, has only deepened in our time. Our students did note that *Hamlet* begins with similar fog-driven sensory confusion concerning what Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo actually see ("Who's there?"; "'Say, what, is Horatio there?' 'A piece of him'") , and their and our confusion about what conclusions we should draw from information our senses gather lasts beyond the final line of the play.

As we pursued the question of whether Hamlet is mad and whether a definitive answer should make any difference to us, students were quick to focus on Hamlet's words and erratic actions in 1.5 and 2.2, fresh from their reading and observations of Branagh's filmic representation of those scenes. As they did, we asked them to take several minutes to respond to a couple of writing prompts. The first asked them to consider a definition of madness: "What does the word or state of being 'insane' mean to you? Define it from your own experience and observations. Provide if you can an example of 'insane' behavior that illustrates your definition. Can you recall a situation when you demonstrated some of the characteristics of your own definition? How? Why?" The second asked them to consider a definition of "sanity" and sane behavior and to be as specific as they could in the process. Here are a few excerpts from their responses:

"I think it [insanity] has to do with how much you live in your head. The more you live in a world you invent, the more mad you are. The more you are able to put things in perspective and really see the world and other people, the more sane you are."

"Being mad is rambling on, ignoring surroundings, and behaving weirdly. Sometimes, to get people to leave you alone, it helps if you get a little mad. Or if you want to get a laugh."

"Sane—being in control of your life, making good decisions, staying out of extremely stressful situations, knowing where you're going and how to get there."

"To be crazy is to be sane. To believe the unbelievable. To imagine the unimaginable."

The responses to the prompts demonstrated a considerable range—that is, there was disagreement about what consti-

tuted "sane" and "crazy" behavior and people in the environment. Some students joked about "crazy" parents whose rules and sometimes contradictory judgments made no sense to them. And, of course, they said the same thing about teachers, and confided that getting along and doing well required them to do assignments, meet deadlines, and fulfill syllabus requirements that some said were "nuts." But, then, they noted their own penchant toward behaving, sometimes intentionally, in ways their parents described as bizarre, unpredictable, strange, "crazy," and some of them exhibited some pride in provoking those kinds of responses.

But, even more interestingly, they expressed and understood the great pressures upon them to conform not only to the patterns of normality prescribed and vigilantly overseen by parents and teachers but also to those arbitrarily defined by the social groups or "cliques" they wished to identify themselves with.

Things in high school haven't changed much in this regard. Both of us vividly remember those pressures. Neither of us did well with them. For any single individual, the identity of one group's characteristics for social "sanity" was another group's social deviance. A couple of students voiced the notion that things like definitions of sanity and insanity—one's deviance from the "norm"—are completely arbitrary constructions of reality, that many of these constructions can co-exist simultaneously, that many of these arbitrary constructions of reality (the ones in their immediate social worlds as well as parental and pedagogical and legal and even political ones) were "crazy," and that most, in order for students to gain some social acceptance and please authority figures and "fit in" while at the same time seeking to find and hold on to an emerging sense of self, caused them to develop a divided self: one side public and seeable, and the other silent, internal, hidden, and carefully protected. This sounded a lot like Hamlet the character to us, and they admitted the parallel.

It seemed like a propitious time for a follow-up on the previous prompt. This time the question involved "to be": "Who *are* you? *Really*? How do you define yourself? What makes you tick? What's your true essence, the stuff that establishes your uniqueness, your *difference* from others?" When we originally

framed the question before the class, we understood that students weren't likely to tell us the entire answer, even if we'd given them considerably more than the allotted five minutes to respond. We anticipated that they might lie, that it would be natural and self-protective to do so, and that gatekeepers receiving messages from their inside on the way out should screen their contents. We told them after they responded that neither of us would expose and make vulnerable our deepest private selves. But we did get some assertive, if somewhat vague, professions of identity:

"I am what I make myself. It's up to me to decide who I want to be. Once I go with one idea, though, it will be difficult to change how people look at me."

"I am an APE. All of my behavior and personality is based on environment and evolution."

"I am open to new things always, looking to make the best out of every situation I'm in."

"I am an eighteen year-old straight Korean-American girl. I live inside my head too much because in my imagination anything is possible. I don't like school because it's very boring. I get impatient very easily. I hate how I look compared to other girls. I want what I can't have. I never take 'no' for an answer. I hate long commitments. I like dogs. In the long run, I want a steady boyfriend, but never married with kids, because I want freedom in my life. I don't want to work in an office. I want to travel. I have a shy side and loud side."

"I am a guy, seventeen, I'm black, I'm Nigerian, I'm Nigerian-American, I'm American, I'm a Christian, I'm a student, I'm a musician, I'm a writer, I'm a friend, but that isn't half of what I *AM* (his emphasis)."

"Since I'm a woman, there's more to me…."

"I am unique and perfectly normal. I am healthy, I am loved. Indecisive. I am a contradiction."

"Describing who I am is like looking into a mirror. You see the reflection of what you look like but have no idea who you are. There is nothing that anyone can say about themselves that isn't a lie. I'm telling you I'm a liar, but you will not see it because you have no idea who I am. I could be full of shit right

now and you would never know, but that is the mystery—we'll never really know who we are right now because it will never be the same as who we used to be."

Very interesting, particularly that last response, which most students vigorously nodded their agreement to while it was being read aloud. And, even further, several students specifically drew our collective attention to the synchronicity of this student's response and Branagh's staging of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" in 3.1. But they didn't stop there. There were several other concrete representations, in the written as well as filmed versions of the play, of Hamlet keeping his own troubled counsel, as seeing himself as "the alien," and angrily diving deep within himself to find and cling to a private self that others were seeking to coopt or still. When one student identified the location of one of these private expressions of self as Hamlet's soliloquy in 2.2 after the newly-arrived theatre company has been led into the court, we agreed and suggested that there were several verbal structures in the play like this one, all soliloquies (1.2; 1.5; 3.1; 4.4) that appeared to be doing what he saw occurring in 2.2.

To provide a slightly different perspective on what they'd shared about their own identities, we asked them to respond to two more prompts: "What does it mean, from your perspective, to be feminine? What kinds of characteristics do you affiliate with that gender orientation? Could you provide an example of behavior or thinking that would be consistent with your definition? To what degree, if any, do you conform to the characteristics of your definition?" We asked them to respond to a "definition of masculine/manly" question with the identical ingredients. All of the responses were intriguing, but here are a few of the "feminine" responses:

"To be feminine you must be a female. You do not like video games,violent movies, or talking about the Simpsons." [my married daughter with two children would be very disappointed!]

"Feminine is saying one thing and meaning another and expecting guys to understand."

"Feminine doesn't mean being female. It means being

polite, dainty, quiet, less dominant."

"Men who take care of themselves, gel their hair, can possess some feminine traits." [Branagh's Hamlet seems to conform to this perception]

"To be feminine is to be confident, beautiful, loving, and emotionally open." [the young Korean woman's previous response to the "identity"question seems to belie this]

Some responses to the "manly" prompt similarly exhibit complexity when it comes to relating gender with identity:

"Manly means to stand up for what you believe and admit your mistakes."

"It is very hard sometimes to concede that I am weak and need help."

"I'm tough when it matters and handy in strange ways like bungeeing the trunk closed with a phone cord I had in my purse and I cry *all* [the student's emphasis] the time. Very emotional."

"Have an obsession with weight training. Deep voices. Into contact sports. Likes to get dirty. I'm not a manly man because sometimes I like to cook or wear facial products."

"Manly doesn't mean being male. It means being physically and emotionally strong."

After interacting and arguing actively and good-naturedly with their peers about some of the details of their responses, they suggested how their own perceptions of "male" and "female" related to the play. Most were quick to note Claudius' and Gertrude's public scolding of Hamlet for mourning the death of his father beyond the acceptable limit ("'tis unmanly grief"), but they also took us to 4.4 when Hamlet, upon being led to the ship for his passage to England, hears from Fortinbras' captain about how the thousands of troops being marched through Elsinore will soon sacrifice their lives meaninglessly and be buried on a Polish postage stamp of ground and then verbally flagellates himself for being untrue to his culture's prevailing code of revenge: "What is a man,/If his chief good and market of his time/Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more./Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,/Looking before and after, gave us not/That

capability and god-like reason/To fust in us unus'd. Now, whether it be/Bestial oblivion, or some craven scruple/Of thinking too precisely on the event,—/A thought which, quarter'd, hath but one part wisdom/And ever three parts coward…" (4.4.33-43)

Clearly, they felt, a definition of masculinity was being imposed by those that "mattered" in his culture on Hamlet—at times, he even attempts to impose it upon himself—and Ophelia has imposed upon her an even more restrictive straight-jacket of what's "feminine" by the end of 1.3 ("From this time, daughter,/Be somewhat scanter of your maiden presence"). In fact, Branagh equips Ophelia with straight-jacket, padded room, and pacifying hosing-downs of cold water on the way to driving her beyond herself. Students commented on the nasty double standard that Laertes and Polonius were wielding like a club over Ophelia and pointed directly to her intelligent response to Laertes' sermon to "just say no" to Hamlet's blandishments ("But my good brother,/Do not, as some ungracious pastors do/Show me the steep and thorny way to heaven,/Whilst, like a puff'd and reckless libertine,/Himself the primrose path of dalliance treads,/And recks not his own rede" in 1.3.46-51).

But members of the class engaged us with other examples to show the considerable confusion about gender identity that this play raises and how Hamlet and Ophelia are being tyrannized into silence by those (Polonius, Claudius) in Hamlet's world who have arrogated to themselves the power of language to determine what it means to be male, female, and "normal": the near hystericism of Hamlet's response when the players arrive in Elsinore and his obsessive preoccupation with things theatrical; his hyperemotionalism, in his soliloquies and elsewhere, that transforms him into a sensitive plant, and his paralysis in the face of decision-making, as seen in 1.2, 1.5, 2.2, 3.1, 3.3, and 4.4, among other textual possibilities. And this is to say nothing about Ophelia's parallel emotional rollercoaster ride , her mental fragility, and her transmission through an extremely "antic disposition", with performances of her own in 4.5 of her somewhat fractured perceptivity of what others have done to dispossess her of her self.

A particularly astute student at this point offered an ob-

servation about her own self-perception in terms of her understanding of who Hamlet and Ophelia were to her in the play. She asserted that her own identity was less a question of "feminine" or "manly" than it was a question of what is required to be "human." To argue and try to enforce a narrow definition of male and female as Claudius, Laertes, Polonius, and even Hamlet Senior ("I find thee apt;/And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed/That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,/Wouldst thou not stir in this" in 1.5.31-34) do is to deny, she said, the manly and feminine aspects of every one of us and to reduce us to G.I. Joe and Barbie knock-offs. Women had been battling for more than a generation for a more open and complex understanding of what a woman is, she said. Another young woman, drawing our attention to the vitriolic public debate over same-sex marriage, the supposed "sanctity" of the institution invoked by defenders of heterosexual unions, and the call by the most powerful in our society for a constitutional ban of same-sex marriage, suggested that, however our society defined insanity, lots of people had gone mad, even rabid, over the issue and that it furnished still another example of how public definitions of "male-ness" and "female-ness" demonstrated inflexibility and intolerance. And, she asserted, Hamlet was the most human character in the play because he evidenced, in his behavior, thought, and feelings, a full range of supposed male and female impulses and responses.

We asked them to return to the issue of "madness" for a moment and to apply it to the play. All of us had, with the help our students had provided, reached a tentative understanding that sanity or madness most often depends upon the situation in which a particular behavior occurs and how, and by whom, that behavior is perceived. There's more than a small chance that Shakespeare had been exposed to the skepticism of Montaigne by John Florio[7], a friend and fellow reveler of Shakespeare and his theatrical contemporaries who would publish his translation of Montaigne's *Essais* in 1600. Montaigne argues, and Shakespeare's "Hamlet" character and play seem to support, that all truth is relative. The phenomenological world—anything outside of our selves—is ultimately unknowable or, at least, subject to

endless interpretation. All we can truly know, says Montaigne, is the self, and that is, as it was for Montaigne, the subject of a life-long and arduous endeavor. We are all ultimately divided from each other by the consciousness that resides behind our eyes and our own subjectivity. Instant and unbridgeable alienation. And, when we asked them to look in the play for a demonstration of madness, they found much to recommend Hamlet either for immediate institutionalization or a clean bill of mental health. He had, they said, intentionally assumed an "antic disposition"; he was, they said, acting in response to the sudden and unexplained death of his father and the much-too-quick remarriage of his mother to her husband's brother as they would—grief and confusion was very natural under his circumstances. The amatory "flip-flopping" that occurs when he meets Ophelia in 3.1 after his soliloquy (his claim that he never gave her the love letters that she has been prompted by her father and Claudius to return and his claim that he alternately did "love you once" and that he "loved you not) makes sense to them. They said they could understand how a cruel and unexpected breaking-off of a relationship they had invested in could stimulate angry and self-protective denial. And, though one student thought Hamlet was having a synapse break when, on the verge of leaving the court on Claudius' command for England, he calls him "mother", others, including Hall and I, saw his redefinition of Claudius as bitterly ironic and appropriate: "My mother: father and mother is man and/ wife, man and wife is one flesh— so, my mother…" (4.3.51-52).

But a lot of Hamlet's behavior defied rationalization. Neither we nor the students could account for the absolute excessiveness of Hamlet's words and actions. I told them that my own students always raised an eyebrow at me when they came upon me in my office in the midst of a vigorous audible discussion with myself, and well they should have; it couldn't be

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[7] The essays by Montaigne most probably pertinent to Shakespeare and this study are "The Apology for Raimond Sebond" and "Of Cannibals," both of which are include in *The Norton Anthology of World Masterpieces*, Vol. 1. 4th continental ed., ed. Maynard Mack (New York: Norton, 1979), 1346-75.

any different for Hamlet who burns huge numbers of lines in self-talk, some of it within hearing distance. And that explosion in his mother's bed chamber during which he kills Polonius, physically man-handles Gertrude, sees the ghost of his father (no swamp gas here!—and Gertrude surely doesn't see it), delivers a Jimmy Swaggart-style sermon against surrendering to one's worst sexual desires, and feverishly counsels his mom to "just say no" is nothing if it isn't crazy.

And, of course, it is. But this made complete sense to members of the class. One after another, they offered comments why it was perfectly normal for Hamlet to be crazy. There he was, surrounded by hypocrites who were counseling some (and not always all) of their kids to do what they said while *not* necessarily telling them to do what *they* did. Wasn't it crazy that Claudius and Gertrude, at their rather advanced age (I took serious issue with them on this!), were marrying so soon after Hamlet Senior's death and that they couldn't keep their hands off each other? Wasn't it "nuts" for Horatio to claim such friendship with Hamlet and to be attending the same university but, when they finally meet in 1.4 and Hamlet shows so much surprise at seeing him there, Horatio has already been at the court for a full two weeks and is able to enlighten the watchmen in 1.1 about why they're on watch in the middle of the night and the impending preparations for an attack by Fortinbras, information that could probably only be gotten by a court insider. If that's crazy, it's even crazier that, at the end of the play, when Hamlet goes silent after commissioning Horatio to deliver a measure of his true self to those surviving, Horatio tells Fortinbras about a Hamlet we've hardly had any experience with in the entire play:

> So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts,
> Of accidental judgements, casual slaughters,
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause,
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fallen on the inventors' heads: all this can I
> Truly deliver. (5.2.380-85)

Not so fast, Horatio. As we discussed Horatio's lines, students heard a voice from him that they said they had never heard before. I told them what I heard was a very typical and undistinguished and almost clichéd prologue to a standard "revenge" play of the period, and, since Hamlet was anything *but* a typical revenger, and, only then, quite by accident, very much out of place here. Horatio may, indeed be preparing to deliver the Hamlet that he thinks he knows, but we have no acquaintance with that Hamlet. The end of the play signals a beginning to a play that we haven't seen yet, and that's crazy.

And this is where the students finished us off. Hamlet was living in a crazy world filled with extremists, hypocrites, and war mongers filled with paranoia and delusions of grandure. Certainly Hamlet is bright and perceptive, if mightily and frequently unhinged. But isn't it sane and normal for Hamlet to be crazy, and, if we were suffering under similar circumstances (and some suggested we were moving close to it in our own world), wouldn't we be crazy *not* to be crazy? Why, indeed, not?

And they seemed pretty comfortable residing for a time in that ambiguity. That's where the play had led them. And that's where we were.

V. Conclusion—All's Well—Dyer

Ambiguity. Not the destination-of-choice of twentieth-century American gradgrinders of young students' behinds through a battery of tests of dubious utility. Not likely to inspire rich effusions of praise from publishers of case books and crib notes or internet sites promoting the sale of "designer" research papers. But, on the other hand, our students seemed to relish being asked to participate in discovering their own Hamlets.

It's risky asking questions. It's somewhat comforting, though, to realize that often there isn't just a single answer to them. And it's the process of arriving at an answer—however tentative—that students need to learn, practice, and trust that will prepare them to move—confidently but without arrogance, narrowness, or prejudice—into a world tinged with shades of gray. As Hall and I tried to ensure while interacting with his

high school students, this discovery of texts works best in a classroom where, indeed, no child is left behind and where everyone's texts are equally valued. It doesn't always work that way. Time, issues of "coverage," and programmatic goals and objectives frequently militate against all of us. But both of us have decided that, if we are going to continue to be engaged and excited about what we teach, if we're serious about exciting our students, if we want them to become active and engaged readers, we may as well invite them to see themselves in what they read. To do so is not to cast them adrift from values or truth. Neither cynicism nor amoral relativism drives our approach. Instead, we want our students to collaborate with us in the learning experience—to share in the teaching process and, ultimately, to assume responsibility for it beyond the classroom. Reader response—however one practices it—begins with a solid set of understandings about what a text is and a procedure to follow. And, in such an enterprise, ambiguity can be the land of opportunity.

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MCTE Grant Provides Differentiated Reading Resources to Park Elementary

Historically, methods for teaching beginning reading have been the subject of controversy since early reading ability influences academic success across the school curriculum. The International Reading Association has developed a position statement to clarify the Association's stance on methods for teaching beginning reading: "There is no single method or single combination of methods that can successfully teach all children to read. Therefore, teachers must have a strong knowledge of multiple methods for teaching reading and a strong knowledge of the children in their care so they can create the appropriate balance of methods needed for the children they teach." One of education's perennial challenges is enabling teachers to divide their time, resources, and efforts to effectively instruct so many students of diverse backgrounds, readiness levels, skill levels, and interests. Differentiated instruction is just that—allowing students to maximize their growth despite the vast differences in abilities within classrooms. Differentiation involves large group instruction, small group instruction, and individualized instruction. Guided reading is one of the methods to differentiate beginning reading instruction.

According to Cindy Merrilees, as presented at her workshop entitled Effectively Using Guided Reading: Help All Your Students Become Better Readers (Grades 1-3,) guided reading is a small group activity involving four to six children working with

a previously unseen book. The role of the each child is to create meaning independently while drawing support from the group and the teacher. Teaching is responsive—the teacher follows the children's lead, supporting their efforts to read for themselves. During guided reading the teacher observes, monitors, affirms, and responds to the children's needs. Rather than provide answers, the teacher helps students become aware of the resources they bring to the task, clues held in the text, and the strategies for combining the two to make meaning. The teacher sets the purposes, invites predictions, asks questions, and reminds students of strategies they've used successfully. The focus is on developing a repertoire of reading strategies in a climate where risk-taking is encouraged and applauded. Guided reading groups are formed by placing together students who have a common need at a particular time. These students are identified from teacher observations during ongoing reading and learning situations and by taking running records. When selecting texts, the amount of supports and challenges within the text should be considered. Ideally, a book should have enough supports to enable the students to keep going with some help, but enough challenges to be engaging. The teacher supports young reading at the moment of need by helping them try out alternate strategies for making meaning.

While the research supporting guided reading is strong, the practical side of funding is a challenge. After checking into various literacy resources, it became apparent that a web site subscription to ReadingA-Z.com offered many and varied resources at a minimal cost. Readinga-z.com supports a balanced approach to literacy by providing a rich selection of resources that will help children become fluent readers. In addition to guided reading books and lessons, ReadingA-Z.com provides phonics resources such as decodable books, read-aloud books, lesson plans, worksheets, and flashcards. There are over 290 lesson plans to accompany each leveled reader and decodable book; over 900 worksheets to reinforce and practice what has been taught; over 1500 flashcards to help teach the alphabetic principle, phonemic awareness, and sound/symbol relationships; over 480 downloadable books to supplement the reading

program. Every month new downloadable resources are provided to members. The printable, leveled readers are suitable for use in small-group guided reading instruction, or for use as take-home books to be read with parents and other family members.

Through a literacy grant from MCTE, thirteen teachers at Park Elementary School, serving students in grades 2-5 in Hutchinson, Minnesota, received a subscription to this website. Others have since joined the site license. Most special education staff have subscriptions, and representatives from each grade level also piloted the resources. Along with the high quality of the materials, other advantages include being able to allow students to write in the books since they are downloaded and then duplicated on the copy machine. Teachers have agreed that the largest disadvantage is the time it takes to download the materials and make the books. In order to address the time issue, all staff who had subscriptions have divided the task of downloading by assigning each person one level of materials to retrieve off of the website and to put in a 3-ring binder in a central location. In this way, these teachers could do a small part to create a large collection of materials readily available for duplication as needed. Also, for those who feel more comfortable with a paper copy than with manipulating their way through a website, these binders of materials are more user-friendly.

After exploring the resources and using them with students, eighteen teachers will continue to subscribe to Readinga-z.com for the 2004-2005 school year. Many thanks to MCTE for enabling Park Elementary teachers to collaborate across grade levels and better individualize instruction for all students in the critical area of literacy. To learn more, go to www.readinga-z.com.

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Call For Papers for *MEJ*'s Next Issue

We want to encourage all of you who are reading this issue to consider yourselves part of our continuing dialogue about language, literature, and composition—about *your* pedagogy and research. And, to aid you in imagining *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 that is elementary, middle, or secondary school; public or private; community college, technical college, public university, or private college.

As you are perusing the list, do not hesitate to contact the editors for clarification on any of the topics or for advice about an item not on the list that you wish to pursue. We welcome the opportunity to work with you. Think about **June 1, 2005**, as a deadline, and think about the **Spring MCTE Conference in April 2005** as a venue for presenting it.

1. ***young adult literature*** (multicultural, American, and/or British)
2. ***teaching and representing Shakespeare*** for high school and college students
3. ***world literatures*** (Anglophone literature; commonwealth literature; African literatures; Caribbean literatures; Latin American literatures; Chicano literature; Native American literature; Asian/American literature; East Indian literature; etc.)
4. ***assessment***, at any level (we're not just thinking about rubrics that work, but the kinds of interventions of the anonymous kind 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., papers/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***
11. ***the "capstone" experience, from portfolio to research paper*** (problems of mentoring and assessment 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***
16. ***the impact of standardized testing on English/language arts curriculum***
17. ***the world wide web and research paper writing***
18. ***does poetry still matter?***
19. ***English language learners***: How can we best serve their needs in the composition classroom?
20. ***what place does grammar have in today's English classes?***
21. ***feedback on student writing***: responding issues
22. ***best practices in the teaching of English/language arts***
23. ***action research/classroom research***

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:

Jean Marie Burtness
MCTE Executive Secretary
P.O. Box 480122
Coon Rapids, MN 55448
jzb@burtness.com

Renew today!

Yes! I want to join my colleagues in supporting our shared professional interests.

Name: _____

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DUES:

- ❍ regular membership $25
- ❍ current MRA member $10
- ❍ undergraduate student $10
- ❍ full-time grad student $10

TEACHING LEVEL:

- ❍ elementary
- ❍ middle/junior high
- ❍ high school
- ❍ two-year college
- ❍ four-year college