# WHAT WE WRITE ABOUT WHEN WE WRITE ABOUT LITERACY: IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY, AND CULTURE IN COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOMS

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# Introduction

## Prologue

On the mantle in my father and stepmother's living room sits a bronze sculpture of a little boy reading a book. He is stretched out on his stomach, calves perpendicular to the floor, ankles hooked together in the air. His mop of hair almost covers his intent eyes, and the book lies open before him. My parents purchased this sculpture at first sight in Maxim's Gallery in Greeley, Colorado. They said it reminded them of me, constantly devouring books. They insist they bought it for me, so that one day it would sit in my living room. I doubt their explanation; I think they bought it for themselves. I suspect it represents a time long past, a moment in our lives in which my father always says he wishes he could have stopped time—a moment where little boys read for no other reason than the sheer enjoyment of living in another world.

I remember I could read before going to school, but I don't remember how I actually learned. I don't remember, in other words, when I "got it." I do remember, though, learning a phonetic rule while trying to read the *TV Guide* to my sisters. At the time, CBS ran a show named *Phyllis*. I hadn't yet learned that P and H together made an F sound, so I kept mispronouncing the title of the show until my sisters let me in on the phonetic rule.

My father's side of the family had a long history of educational achievement. My grandfather was a Methodist minister. Family legend has it that before he entered seminary, he had the chance to join the chorus of the Metropolitan Opera, with the chance to understudy. My father taught English and Social Studies for years before becoming a hospital administrator. He eventually earned an MBA. My aunts earned bachelor's degrees; one is a social worker, and the other is an elementary teacher in Germany. My uncle is a psychiatrist. After my parents divorced, my mother returned to college and earned her bachelor's degree in social work. My older sister followed suit, and recently earned her master's degree. My other sister earned her degree in political science. My brother was the intellectual oddity in my family. He had a bachelor's degree in physics and did some graduate work in engineering.

The books I read as a child were all escapist. I cannot claim to have enjoyed the works I'm now espousing as an English teacher. I remember finding out that Willa Cather read Virgil as a young girl on the prairies of Nebraska. I, however, a young boy on the high plains of western Nebraska, was reading Encyclopedia Brown, the Tizz books, and later, devouring sword and sorcery books during my free time. I read the Dungeons and Dragons series by Tracy Hickman and Margaret Weis, the Shannara books by Terry Brooks, the Mithgar books by Dennis McKiernan (unapologetic copies, for the most part, of Tolkien,) but my favorites were perhaps the Belgariad and Mallorean series by David Eddings.

It was really in high school that literary reading held more interest for me. My freshman English teacher, Mrs. Clark, assigned *My Ántonia*. I remember most of the other students grousing about having to read it, but I loved it. Here, in a canonized novel,

was my world. And my world, at least according to Willa Cather, was worthy of literature. My Nebraska became the scene of epic struggle, heroic characters, sweeping beauty. That semester Mrs. Clark took us to Red Cloud to tour all the places Cather describes in her fiction. That trip delineated the differences between me and my friends, on one hand, and the rest of the freshman class of Chase County High School, on the other. My friends (not a large group, by any definition) were fascinated by how a writer could take the stuff of her life and turn it into art. We assumed that Nebraska could not be material for literary fiction. Imperial, Nebraska was a place from which to escape, to go someplace far more glamorous, to go to places where intelligence and talent were valued over athletic ability. And yet here Cather took what we thought had to be substandard raw material (and indeed some of her contemporary literary critics felt the same[1]) and made a novel that English teachers would assign as literature. For me, it was nothing short of a paradigm shift. Most of my classmates, on the other hand, would mostly remember that Jay Bubak and Jason McNair bought condoms in the Red Cloud drug store and blew them up like balloons on the bus.

Sixth grade began a long succession of English teachers who encouraged me to write—first Mrs. Hegwood, then Miss Kalal, then Mrs. Clark. The writing in these classes was an odd mix of current-traditional modes and expressivist pedagogies. Descriptive writing and narration dominated. The value of this writing, for me, was not that I was learning how to write better. My writing may not have improved at all. I did, however, learn to love writing, because I did it well enough to distinguish myself. The rewards for writing in school were entirely performative. The teachers would ask us to read our work in front of the class. Mine was descriptive and funny enough to make me

special. For someone not particularly athletically gifted in a state where sports are everything, any encouragement for a creative activity was intoxicating.

One summer, I arranged bookshelves and a tall desk into a private office in my room, and completed the space with a typewriter. There I began work on my first novel, which amounted to about six pages of unstructured rambling. The next couple years, however, I wrote two short novellas—one could only be described as a proto-romance (I had read too many novels by Phyllis A. Whitney), and the other a science fiction story detailing the horrific aftermath of a nuclear apocalypse.

As I completed high school, my creative writing had to share my time with journalism. Going to college was assumed and expected in my family. As a teen, I once tried to push my parents' buttons by announcing that I wasn't going to college. My parents defused and frustrated my machinations by saying, "Okay, that's fine." What I find interesting about that story is not my parents' successful handling of the situation, but that I thought the suggestion that I wouldn't go to college would affect them. The fact was that I was going to college, whether I wanted to or not. I enrolled at the University of Nebraska as a journalism major, reasoning that with journalism I could get paid to write. I quickly grew dissatisfied with journalism, though, because the thought of writing at a certain level of complexity began to disturb me. In addition, the faculty seemed a bit too enamored of the mythologies of the profession, regaling us with tales of cub reporters, city-council beats, and crotchety editors. The thought of living my life in an episode of *Lou Grant* held little appeal. A short stint as a voice-performance major followed. I soon discovered, however, that my English class that semester, Contemporary Fiction, was commanding more of my time and attention than my Music Theory lab, and I switched

majors, for the last time, to English. While in the English Department, I distinguished myself as a creative writer, winning departmental awards for my fiction.

The main reason for pursuing graduate school was to have the job my professors had. I thought at the time that I wanted to get paid to talk about writers and writing, that teaching was the financial means to live a life of words. I wanted to be a writer-teacher, teach as my vocation and write as my avocation. The priorities were clear: my own art was to come first, the needs of my students second. Indeed, as I pursued my Master of Fine Arts degree at the University of Arizona, I found that my professors explicitly confirmed those priorities. They wanted to help me, but never at the expense of their own writing time. The U of A English Department did not have the funding to give me a teaching assistantship, so I did not learn how to teach as I earned my MFA. Therefore, I did not have much luck finding a full-time teaching job once I graduated. I jumped from job to job—the University of Nebraska Press, the state Department of Health and Human Services—but I remained restless. Then, I started teaching one section per quarter at Southeast Community College.

The first day I was so nervous that I walked into class ten minutes early, smiled briefly at the students filing in, and doodled prayers of tranquility to every higher power I could think of. Once class started, however, and introductions turned into a way to form community, I was hooked in a matter of minutes, and enrolled at Oklahoma State University for my doctoral studies. In the six years I've taught, I've watched students bloom and resist, struggle and comprehend, succeed and question. Researching and thinking about how to help students transform from intimidated novices to members of a knowledge community ended up taking a great deal of my intellectual energy.

About a year before my mother passed away, I sat on the steps of Morrill Hall talking with her on my cell phone. I was talking about my teaching, and eventually she said, "You really love what you do, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," I replied.

"That's good," she said. The brief silence afterward spoke more than the rest of the conversation. It was the silence of relief, the silence of a mother who spent too many years worrying whether her youngest child would find his way in the world, and finally knew that he had.

I include this story for a couple of reasons. The first is that my story is really not very different from most of my students. As we will see, contemporary college students have cherished memories of special books that they read for the sheer joy of it. Many of my students knew they would be going to college—their parents seemingly offered no other alternative. Family, for my students as for me, played a crucial role in how they learned and consumed literacy. The other reason I included my narrative is in the spirit of Richard Miller's "institutional autobiography" genre. Knowing how I got to this point hopefully clarifies why this research interests me so much, and why I think it is so important.

## Starting Points: Theory, Scholarship, Research

When we look at much of the research on college students' literacy, we see a great deal of reading habits surveys. For example, Friedberg, et al.'s study of medical students at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel asked 47 third-year students to keep a daily diary of their reading and complete a questionnaire at the end of an

endocrinology course. They found that the students spent an average of 151 minutes reading for their studies. Lecture notes received the most attention from the students (72% of the students' reading time), followed by 25% on textbooks and 3% on articles.

Jude Gallik's study of the recreational reading habits of 139 students at a private liberal-arts college in Texas provides an illuminating portrait of the time the students spent engaging in non-academically-related reading. 63% of the respondents reported reading 2 hours or less each week. Only 13% reported reading recreationally 6 or more hours per week during school terms. Gallik found no significant correlation between cumulative grade-point average and recreational reading when classes were in session; however, there was a weak correlation between cumulative grade-point average and time spent in recreational reading during vacations. Students read magazines the most, followed by letters, e-mail, and chat rooms. Undergraduates reported that comic books were the least popular reading material.

In contrast, Allen and Ingulsrud found that among Japanese students comic books, called *manga*, continue to be increasingly popular, to the consternation of educators and parents. Their study of 297 college students revealed four reasons for the popularity of these comics: (1) an interesting way to pass rare free time, (2) escapism, (3) learning new vocabulary to describe their experiences, and (4) easily accessible text. Allen and Ingulsrud insist that *manga*, if used with care, can be used effectively in the classroom.[2]

While these studies paint a valuable portrait of college students' reading habits, I would suggest that possibly they do not ask the right questions. Reading habits surveys most often ask, "Are they reading?" and perhaps, "What are they reading?" These studies often do not ask, "Why are they reading? For what reasons?" My research instead seeks

to ask these questions. This present study, then, departs from a great deal of college-level literacy research (with its emphasis on reading habits and abilities) to examine what Deborah Brandt calls "literacy…as it has been lived" (11), one of the primary assumptions of New Literacy Studies.

One of the most foundational texts in New Literacy Studies, Brian V. Street's *Literacy in Theory and Practice*, seeks to debunk what he terms an "autonomous" model of literacy. According to this model, literacy is a neutral technology which cultures develop as they advance. One of the effects of this "neutral" technology, though, is that literates develop more advanced skills in logic and abstraction, and their communication becomes less dependent upon context. Street spends the first half of his book both discrediting this theory and offering another option, the "ideological" model of literacy, which instead seeks to examine literacy as it works within specific social, cultural, historical, and economic contexts.

The autonomous model is flawed, Street argues, because it assumes that any technology can truly be neutral, that is, independent of ideology. Thus literacy, as another form of technology, is also neutral. This neutral or autonomous model of literacy is most clearly seen, Street demonstrates, through the studies of scholars such as Angela Hilyard, David Olson, Patricia Greenfield, and Jack Goody. Their cognitive studies on non-literate populations concluded that oral societies are not as advanced in logic, abstract thinking, and context-independent communication. However, subsequent studies (most notably by Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner) showed that people in oral societies are just as capable of logical, abstract thinking as those in literate societies. Moreover, Street points out,

> Members of supposedly "primitive" societies clearly engage in scientific practices, such as empirical testing of hypotheses, when they plant seeds, the successful growth of which is vital for their survival. Levi-Strauss has shown, further, that the classification of the natural world amongst the South American Indian tribes is as complex and as interesting as those of the academic biologist, at an intellectual as well as a utilitarian level. (25)

In addition, as far as context-dependent communication is concerned Street "would challenge [these researchers] to demonstrate what speech, whether oral or written, was not" (30). These scholars, Street insists, are discussing levels or degrees of context-dependency, without defining what those levels are and making explicit how they do so.

Ultimately, the cognitive skills that these researchers test demonstrate "their own academic establishment, their own work practice within it, their own rules and values" (38). In other words, the researchers Street examines apply western, European educational standards to non-western cultures as if those standards were normative, objective, and universal. "It is in this sense," Street argues, "that the claims we have been examining concerning the consequences of literacy are 'ideological.' They derive from the writers' own work practice and belief system and serve to reinforce it in relation to other groups and cultures" (39). A more fruitful approach to literacy research, Street offers, seeks "to understand literacy in terms of concrete social practices and to theorize it in terms of the ideologies in which the literacies are embedded" (95). To that end, Street catalogues the work of several scholars, such as Michael Clanchy, Harvey Graff, and John Parry as examples of research into how cultures adapted to and used literacy in relation to ideological and social interests. This study is grounded in these concerns—

rather than explore the benefits or efficacy of literacy or certain forms literacy instruction, I am more interested in examining how contemporary college students use literacy in response to ever-present ideologies and for their own explicitly expressed needs.

Miles Myers, in his book *Changing Our Minds: Negotiating English and Literacy*, traces the development of literacy standards, and thus literacy instruction, in the United States under the premise that standards change due to a diverse array of concerns, and instruction must then change to meet those new standards. Myers suggests that "changes in standards of literacy are explained by (and associated with) occupational shifts, ideological shifts, national debate, and changes in the nation's form of schooling, models of mind, and literacy assessment" (16). Moreover, Myers utilizes the work of scholars in education, communication, and history to show that literacy standards change due the effects of urbanization, the political interaction interactions of Protestantism and capitalism, the development of the printing press, and the vicissitudes of a failing or growing economy (5).

Myers then traces how those mass literacy changes manifested themselves in the United States. For example, he notes that "[a]lthough in the U.S. of the late 1600s and early 1700s printed materials were fast becoming a dominant form of literacy among the educated, in the general population, face-to-face or oral literacy was the dominant form of everyday literacy practice" (23). This mode of communication, he suggests, served well a population that largely stayed in one area, and for whom intense communal relations were crucial for social harmony.

Oracy gave way to "signature/recording literacy," which was the dominant form of literacy in the United States from 1776—1864. A literate during signature/recording

literacy was one who "could sign their names or who could both read and write, at least a little" (45). Myers points out that this form of literacy developed as a response to a population that traveled much more freely due to, among other things, the Louisiana Purchase. This increased travel meant that communities had to deal more often with strangers, and needed a new form of literacy "in order to carry out, to remember, and to record legally their economic and social dealings" (944). From 1864—1916, a new standard of literacy arose in response to the rise in industrialization and the influx of immigrants. Myers calls this standard "recitation/report literacy" which emphasized "memorized orations, oral pronunciation drills, dictation followed by copying, oral spelling bees, and extensive reading through 'read-aloud' activities" (69). Part of the reason for this form of literacy was to "help teach discipline to children with 'working fathers' and to introduce new immigrants to the ways of their new country" (65).

From 1916—1983, Myers argues, literacy standards changed again, this time in response to "the functional needs of a centralized city market, the centralized factory, centralized government, and the increasingly anonymous modes of discourse through which individuals interacted" (98). This new literacy, which Myers calls "decoding/analytic literacy," sought to examine texts and information more scientifically, so that students became more adept at categorizing and compartmentalizing them by genre, discipline, tradition, and form, among other things. Reading, then, was assessed by the student's ability to extract bits of information from any given reading. This form of literacy served well the needs of an American society shifting away from "home, neighborhoods, and fragmented urban areas to centralized cities and factories" because "workers needed to be able to get literal, basic meanings from unfamiliar, anonymous

materials in order to survive in a large corporation, a mass army, a large factory, and a mass communication system where newly printed materials appeared daily" (99—100).

However, Myers points out, between 1960—1983, educators and policy makers began to realize that decoding/analytic literacy was not meeting the "new demands of contemporary economic problems and the workplace, the new demands of pluralism and diversity in our society, and the new demands for new supports for personal growth" (117). A new standard for mass literacy emerged, designed to help students "learn how to work in teams, how to learn, how to problem solve, and how to use an increasing range of tools" (112). Myers calls this new form "translation/critical literacy," the standard in which we currently find ourselves. Throughout his book, Myers provides evidence to show that as each form of literacy gained dominance, schools managed to meet those standards. The problem, however, as Myers notes, is that schools develop effective curricula after the fact, that is, once a form of literacy has clearly gained ascendancy. Therefore, the "literacy crises" that pop up occur during those periods when a new literacy standard is being defined and negotiated.

Myers' concerns with how economic change affects literacy instruction are developed much further in Deborah Brandt's *Literacy in American Lives*. This text is perhaps the most foundational for this present study. Brandt interviewed 80 people in south-central Wisconsin to assemble a portrait of how they learned, used, and valued literacy in their lives. I will discuss Brandt's research much more in the chapters to follow, but here I will briefly gloss three of the most important concepts which inform this study.

The most important idea from *Literacy in American Lives* is the idea of literacy as resource. Brandt explains that for her study, "literacy is treated primarily as a resource—economic, political, intellectual, spiritual—which, like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers" (5). To look at literacy this way, Brandt points out, helps us understand why people go to such extraordinary lengths to secure literacy for themselves and their children, particularly in our current knowledge- and- information-based economy.

The second idea that Brandt developed from her research is the notion of literacy sponsorship. For Brandt, literacy sponsors are "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach and model, as well as recruit, regulate, suppress, or withhold, literacy—and gain advantage by it in some way" (19). This is a sweeping definition, the beauty of which is that it offers innumerable possibilities for exploration. However, because Brandt focused her research in people who were fostering their literacy skills in a workplace or personal environment, her treatment of her ideas in a post-secondary context is scant. How does literacy sponsorship work in college? Are college instructors literacy sponsors? Partly, Brandt says, in an article that became one of the chapters in her book. Unfortunately, one very crucial idea that did not translate from article to book problematizes the teacher as sponsor:

> [W]e haul a lot of freight for the opportunity to teach writing. Neither rich nor powerful enough to sponsor literacy on our own terms, we serve instead as conflicted brokers between literacy's buyers and sellers. At our most worthy, perhaps, we show the sellers how to beware and try to make

> sure these exchanges will be a little fairer, maybe, potentially, a little more mutually rewarding. ("Sponsors" 183)

For many of the students in this study, teachers jostle to broker literacy for their students, but as Brandt has explained, they tend to fade into the distance as sponsors. As we will see, as well, sponsorship for college writing students is a complex notion, but one still crucial for understanding how and why students write and read for their degrees.

The third concept in Brandt's book that holds particular significance for this study is her notion of "accumulations of literacy." Borrowing from Myers' chronology of mass-literacy development, Brandt sees previous literacy practices inextricably intertwined in present literacy values, which will then be revisited in future literacy practices. As she explains,

> Rapid changes in literacy and education may not bring so much a rupture from the past as they bring an accumulation of different and proliferating pasts, a piling up of literate artifacts and signifying practices that can haunt the sites of literacy learning. These complicated amalgamations of literacy's past, present, and future formulate the interpretive puzzle faced by current generations of literacy learners. (104)

We will see many instances in which several generations of literacy values and standards inhabit the lives and practices of contemporary college students. Like Stephen North's metaphor of a house of lore in regard to teaching practices, in which nothing is ever discarded, college students constantly shuttle between different literacy ideologies as they negotiate their way though university life.

The foundational problem of Richard Miller's book *Writing at the End of the World* centers on what place the humanities hold in the late-20th- and early-21st centuries. In an age torn apart by terrorist attacks and school shootings, what do the humanities have to offer? "Reading, writing, talking, meditating, speculating, arguing: these are the only resources available to those of us who teach in the humanities," Miller muses, and yet, "there are dark days when I doubt the activities of reading and writing have much of a future" (4). Throughout his book, Miller meditates not only on the national tragedies that seem to tumble one over the other into our cultural consciousness, but also on personal heartbreaks such as his father's suicide. Reading and writing still have a place in this "end of the world," but we have to rethink radically what we are to teach our students, and moreover, what kinds of writing "matter." One definition of writing that matters, for Miller, is "writing that provides a therapeutic outlet for the author," which "expresses the writer's need for the world" (42). Academic writing, for Miller, can only matter if writers use words to make sense of irrational experience, to reorder the world in which they live. However, another agenda, particularly interesting for me, appears later in the book, in a chapter entitled "The Arts of Complicity." Here Miller advocates a different kind of pedagogy in the composition classroom, a pedagogy which promotes

> (1) ways for students to acquire a fluency in the ways that the bureaucratic systems that regulate our lives use words; (2) a familiarity with the logics, styles of argumentation, and repositories of evidence employed by organizational bodies; and (3) a fuller understanding of what can and cannot be gained through discursive exchanges, with a concomitant recalibration of the horizon of expectations that is delineated by our sense

> of what words can or cannot do when deployed in the public sphere. Were I a polemicist, I might say that what I am after is a pragmatic pedagogy, one grounded in "the arts of complicity, duplicity, and compromise," the very same arts that are deployed, with such enervating effect, by the host of social, bureaucratic, and corporate institutions that, together, govern our lives. (136)

Such a "pragmatic pedagogy" not only resembles the "translation/critical literacy" paradigm that Myers describes, but also what Russel Durst calls "reflective instrumentalism" in his book *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*. Durst's study examines the resistance students show to what he terms "critical literacy" pedagogies. His conception of critical literacy combines the Freirean version of critical pedagogy, concerned with promoting social justice and developing an awareness of power inequality through language, with teaching that emphasizes critical thinking (questioning assumptions, evaluating evidence, examining rhetorical purpose, etc.) However, such a pedagogical stance, Durst found, conflicted with the pragmatic goals that students brought with them into their writing classes. Table 1 shows the opposing agendas that Durst argues students and teachers bring into the classroom.

**Table 1. Differing goals in the composition classroom**

| Students | Teachers |
|---|---|
| • Career-oriented<br>• Pragmatic<br>• Think writing is a difficult but useful technology<br>• Would prefer to learn a way of writing that is<br>  o Simple, quick, and efficient<br>  o Applicable in all or most | • Stress more complex and demanding notions of critical literacy<br>• Teaching often emphasizes self-reflection, explicit consideration of ideological issues, rigorous development of ideas, and questioning established ways of |

| | |
|---|---|
| situations<br>o Either reducible to a formula or straightforward set of rules or free from rules, prescriptions, and restrictions<br>• Writing should be designed not to complicate their already stressful, busy lives, but rather to make their lives run more smoothly<br>• Wish for simpler, more straightforward, and less conflictual approach | thinking<br>• Promote extensive invention and revision, careful consideration of audience, and sensitive reading and re-reading of one's own and other's texts<br>• Approaches are designed to complicate rather than simplify students' lives and thinking<br>• Promote interpretation, critique, meta-awareness, and dialectic types of intellectual work |

Durst's study found that in light of their pragmatic goals for their writing education, students found his critical literacy pedagogy "pessimistic, negative, and accusatory, at a time when they are working hard to sustain the optimism and motivation necessary to do the hard work being asked of them" (176). Moreover, such an approach also confirmed stereotypes of ivory tower academics attempting to "cram…liberal ideas down [their] throats" (157). Durst suggests that, rather than accusing students of anti-intellectualism and reactionism, teachers can find ways to use students' pragmatism as a way to provoke critical thinking, which he calls reflective instrumentalism:

> the approach accepts students' pragmatic goals, offers to help them achieve their goals, but adds a reflective dimension that, while itself useful in the work world, also helps students place their individual aspirations in the larger context necessary for critical analysis. (178)

One way to do that, Durst offers, is to design a class around the topic of higher education which "present[s] students with diverse points of view on many central issues that have shaped contemporary thought about higher education" (178-9). The approaches of both

Miller and Durst, as we have seen, more closely match the complex cultural, social, and economic forces that contemporary students must grapple with as they embark on what is still an expensive investment—higher education. However, this higher education, as James Berlin has pointed out, is no longer a free pass to social advancement, as it once was; it is now more like a chance to compete for social advancement (218).

A quick note on terms: as we have seen, there really is no such thing as "literacy." We have, instead, "literacies"—different uses of writing and reading for different purposes by different individuals. Therefore, in this study I have tried to adhere largely to C.H. Knoblauch's definitions of literacy as he described them in his article "Literacy and the Politics of Education." Knoblauch establishes four categories of literacy: "functional literacy," the everyday uses of reading and writing to survive, such as reading bus schedules and writing checks; "cultural literacy," the reading and writing, such as literary studies, used by societies to transmit their values; "literacy for personal growth," often found in expressive writing, personalized reading, and whole-language programs; and critical literacy, with an "agenda identifying reading and writing abilities with a critical consciousness of the social conditions in which people fins themselves, recognizing the extent to which language practices objectify and rationalize these conditions" (79). Knoblauch's categories are not perfect, however. For instance, is creative writing personal or cultural literacy, or shades of both? Also, where do we place academic literacy, the essayistic forms valued in colleges and universities? Such literacy does not fit comfortably with Knoblauch's critical literacy. For the purposes of this study, I use the term "critical literacy" to refer to the Freirean critical pedagogy practices that Knoblauch identifies. For the literacy valued in higher education, I return to Myers, who uses several

terms to describe this standard of literacy, with a twist. Myers calls our most recent standard "translation/critical literacy," which tends to confuse the kind of literacy Myers describes, which fosters "higher-order thinking skills" (109), with Freirean critical literacy that uses language and critical-thinking skills as a means to examine fundamental power relationships. In other words, critical literacy aspires to urge students to action; Myers' translation/critical literacy does not always require students to take action. I use, instead, Myers' terms "new literacy" or "higher literacy" to describe the writing and reading valued in post-secondary institutions.

Unfortunately, scholarship and research in composition currently far outstrips those of creative writing. This research seeks to begin remedying this inequality. While composition and creative writing may seem to be disparate fields, there is much to recommend studying them together. There are some important connections between the two. In practical terms, my teaching experience has shown that students do not make much distinction between the two. Writing, of whatever stripe, is a mysterious process for which the presence of a muse would be a helpful asset. In addition, Ted Lardner, using Richard Fulkerson's "disciplinary paradigm" or "metatheory," sees many similarities between creative writing and composition pedagogies. Wendy Bishop, as well, argues that perhaps the conceptual line between creative writing and composition needs to be erased. For one thing, when students are truly engaged in their non-fiction, academic writing, they are involved in "creative" writing, that is, writing that is imaginative, engaging, and fun for the writer. Moreover, Bishop notes that creative writing teachers and compositionists have been pilfering from each other for years, so drawing too sharp a

distinction between the disciplines compromises the gains made by both camps from investigating each other.

## About This Study

Because of the influence of Brandt's work, I decided to see how her ideas expressed themselves among college writers. Literacy as a resource, I realized, takes on intense importance in college, because college has attained, and continues to hold, an emblematic status as an indicator of advancement. Therefore, I was curious to see how Brandt's notions of literacy as a resource, literacy sponsorship, and (in Brandt's terms) ideological accumulations of literacy played out in the writing of my students.

I conducted this study at Oklahoma State University, a large land-grant university on the Southern Plains which includes five campuses throughout the state. According to the Fall 2006 Student Profile compiled by the OSU Department of Institutional Research and Information Management, the Stillwater campus hosts about 20,000 students, the largest contingent of the system's student population. The majority of its students (about 77%) qualify as in-state residents for tuition purposes, so most of its students come from Oklahoma towns. White students represent the majority of the population (about 82%), with Native Americans as the second largest racial group at about 9%, African Americans at 4%, Hispanics at 2%, and Asians at 1%. OSU offers degrees from bachelors through the doctorate level, with strong programs in Engineering, Agriculture, and Business, as well as the liberal arts and sciences. The largest contingent of its undergraduate students (23.8%) came from high schools with a graduating class of 400—599; however, an almost equally large number (23.6%) came from schools with a graduating class of 200—399. 39.6% graduated from high schools with graduating classes of 199 or fewer, while

only 13% came from schools with graduating classes of 600 or greater. This suggests that while a large number of students move to Stillwater from Oklahoma City or Tulsa, the majority of the students are from small-town and rural backgrounds.

The students who participated in the study reflect the breakdown of Oklahoma State's student population. 75% of the students identified as White or Caucasian, and 14% identified as both Native American and White. One student identified as Native American only, and one student identified as both white and Asian. 53% of the students considered themselves middle class, while 32% thought their families upper-middle class. Only 2 students identified as lower middle class, and one student indicated upper-class status. Interestingly, more Introduction to Creative Writing students defined themselves as upper-middle class (37% compared to 27%). The majority, however, felt more comfortable defining their socioeconomic status as solidly middle class. 75% of the students were Oklahoma residents, most of them coming from small towns. The non-resident students came from Texas, Kansas, and Colorado.

The students who participated in the study were enrolled in one of two courses I taught in Spring 2006: Critical Analysis and Writing II (ENGL 1413) and Introduction to Creative Writing (ENGL 2513). Participation was strictly voluntary, and no negative consequences accompanied refusal to participate. I changed all their names to pseudonyms in this study to protect their confidentiality. I have quoted extensively from my students' work throughout this study, and many of the quotations contain sentence-level errors. I have chosen to include the students' writing verbatim; I did not silently correct the errors or use the term "sic" when errors occur. The reader, I felt, deserved to see exactly how the students expressed their ideas. In addition, using "sic" seemed to call

attention unnecessarily on perceived shortcomings, rather than on the important concepts that the quotations illuminate.

The Critical Analysis and Writing class was part of a two-semester first-year writing sequence for students who either received high verbal scores on their ACTs or SATs, or who were recommended by their teachers, as above-average writers, to take the course. I designed the course around issues of literacy and education for two reasons. The first is that I am particularly interested in these fields as a researcher. The second reason is that I believe that if educators ask students to think about education and how it is provided and consumed, students will be better prepared to succeed on their other classes. Durst, also, sees value in asking students to learn that

> a major is more than a set of courses leading to certification and employment, that it constitutes a body of knowledge and a set of problem-solving strategies, that it promotes particular ways of thinking and acting, that it has a history, and that it performs certain functions in the larger society. (179).

We began the class by writing literacy narratives. The literacy narratives were important for several reasons. I wanted each student to establish a baseline of their literacy beliefs, that is, get their initial beliefs and attitudes on paper so that they could compare their preliminary views with their thoughts about literacy later on. Also, by doing this, the narratives became a scaffolding technique, so that all their schematic knowledge of literacy was fresh in their minds as they embarked upon their inquiry throughout the course. As we finished up those narratives, the students began reading excerpts from writers like Sven Birkerts, Jonathan Franzen, E.D. Hirsch, and Neil

Postman, authors particularly concerned with Americans' reading lives. After we read those texts, I asked the students to write an essay responding to the arguments of two of these authors. After that, the students embarked upon a research project of their own choosing based on the course theme. Some of the topics that the students investigated included the phonics/whole language debate, technological literacy, and home schooling. One student, a senior honors student on Political Science and Russian, extended her honors-thesis research to include language-education initiatives in Latvia. I asked the class to finish up the semester by writing reflective essays to gauge the intellectual work they did over the course of the semester. A copy of the syllabus is available in the Appendix.

Students take the Introduction to Creative Writing class for a couple of purposes. It is the gateway course for more advanced courses in writing fiction and poetry. However, it also qualifies as a humanities credit in many degree requirements, so many students take the course with no intention of pursuing their creative writing studies further. I designed the course according to the common workshop format, with two of the three class days per week devoted to discussing the students' pieces. One day during the week, however, was devoted to discussing published pieces of fiction, poetry, and drama. Like many creative writing teachers, I taught the class under the assumption that good writers are also eager readers. This assumption is common among creative writing teachers.[3] In addition to compiling a portfolio of their best work in all three genres (fiction, poetry, and drama,) the students also led one discussion of a published text. I included this requirement as a way to get the students more actively involved in examining each piece. Finally, the students completed a semester-long reading journal, in

which they discussed the reading they did both in and outside of class. I gave them a great deal of freedom—they could write about whatever they read, whatever genre, as long as it affected their writing. This requirement was a bit disingenuous, as Faulkner would assert that every bit of reading affects one's writing anyway. In an interview, he urged young writers to "Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad; see how they do it" (qtd. in Inge 68). Such an assignment can help students realize how much of their reading filters its way into their writing. As with the Critical Analysis and Writing class, a syllabus for the Introduction to Creative Writing class is available in the Appendix.

For this study, I examined several varieties of artifacts that the students wrote. In the Critical Analysis and Writing class, I looked at their rough and final drafts of all their essays, as well as their literacy narrative questionnaires. For the Introduction to Creative Writing class, I looked at their literacy narrative questionnaires, reading journals, and reflective questionnaires at the end of the semester. While I left open the possibility for follow-up interviews, the data generated by the written materials was so plentiful that I concentrated on these artifacts. In addition, since these were, after all, writing courses, I thought that much could be learned from examining only student writing. I was right; these texts proved to be rich in ideology and rhetorical sophistication. A copy of the questionnaires is available in the Appendix, as well as a copy of the IRB approval form.

This study follows, for the most part, the methodology of the case study, in the tradition of those done by researchers such as Janet Emig and Sondra Perl. Stephen North praises case studies for the full, rich descriptions they provide. Researchers using case studies concern themselves with "individual[s]…not type[s]," and "revel in…idiographic inquiry" (237). The strength of this type of research, as Janice M. Lauer and William

Asher suggest, is a deep immersion into the specific contexts of writing and reading. Rather than artificially creating variables to test, qualitative research delves into the scenes of writing and reading to identify possible variables and hypotheses (23). This study is a bit different from a traditional case study, in that I looked at the work of a number of students. Doing so allowed me a bit more freedom to explore the variety of student responses found in this study. In addition, because this research is largely unexplored territory, I decided to err on the side of more description rather than less.

In addition, this study was also influenced by context-sensitive text analysis, as described by Thomas N. Huckin. This methodology, by examining writers' texts, recognizes that writers "…live and perform in a multi-variegated, sociocultural *context*" (85, emphasis in original). Thus, as Huckin suggests, examining written products is a useful way of uncovering the cultural assumptions, beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies under which writers create their texts.

As I read though all of the data I had collected, new questions started to present themselves: Why were the literacy narrative questionnaires so much more revealing than the literacy narrative essays? Why were so many of the essays so banal, when our in-class discussions were more spirited and complicated? Why did so many students resist the reading journals? As I examined each student's writing, new patterns, ideas, and hypotheses emerged. Chapter 2 begins this study by concentrating on the questionnaires and literacy narratives of the Critical Analysis and Writing students. Parents and family stand out as the predominant literacy sponsors for these students, but very few teachers do. In addition, the questionnaires were often more revealing than the literacy narratives in essay form. In fact, the students consciously constructed the narratives to establish

often archetypal identities for themselves as devotees of literacy. Chapter 3 examines two essays the Critical Analysis and Writing students wrote: a response essay and a final reflective essay. In these texts, we see the rhetorical dexterity and ideological flexibility that the students display as they interrogate and challenge beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies about literacy while still professing their allegiance to it. Chapter 4 shifts focus to the Introduction to Creative Writing students. These students' memories confirm many of the sponsorship and literacy accumulations of the Critical Analysis and Writing students, but they also reveal the compulsions many students feel to compartmentalize and prioritize their literacy choices through a complex method of resource allocation. Chapter 5 considers how the students approached the assignment of completing a reading journal for the class. Their journals revealed an intricate accession and resistance to the disciplinary motivations of the assignment. While some students used the journals to learn how to "read like a writer," many students also used the journal to further their cultural literacy, and still others harnessed the journals and their reading to investigate issues from their lives of particular import to them. I conclude the study by suggesting its implications for teaching and proposing new avenues of research.

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Joseph Harris, in his readable and interesting *A Teaching Subject: Composition Since 1966*, presents a long list of the texts that surrounds Americans on any given day. Indeed, he argues,

> [o]ur media culture is saturated with texts. Much of our experience is bound up with reading…. I don't mean reading in a loose or metaphorical sense. I mean that we all spend much of our time decoding and interacting

> with texts…I have never met a college student whose life was not taken up in large part by the sorts of reading I have just described. (19)

The students in this study, as we will see, are very well aware of the embarrassment of riches that besieges them every day. How they handle the barrage, what choices they make, and what values they assign to the writing and reading they engage in daily illuminates the identities we all create for ourselves, the ideologies we all are steeped in, and the ways we all respond to our literacy-based culture. Our students are buyers of the literacy training we offer, but they do not necessarily buy unquestioningly into all the ideologies we want them to accept. As teachers, we must understand the complex nature of their enthusiasm and skepticism, their concession and resistance, if we are to teach them most effectively.

## Notes

1. For a wonderfully biting survey of Cather criticism, see Joan Acocella's witty book, *Willa Cather and the Politics of Criticism*.
2. More examples of this type of post-secondary literacy research include Blackwood et al., Brooks, Diaz-Lefebvre, and Duchein and Mealey.
3. For more information on this ideological touchstone in the field, please see Chapter 5.

# Chapter 2

## "Both a Blessing and a Curse": Literacy Sponsorship and Student Identity in Literacy Narratives

Educators have long recognized the benefits of incorporating literacy narratives into their classrooms. Bronwyn Williams, for example, uses the narratives to "provide a sense of students' prior literacy experiences and of their general feelings toward writing and reading." In addition, the narratives help Williams foresee "potential resistance" to her teaching (342). For Mary Kooy, one of the virtues of literacy narratives is that they provide a scaffold for new learning, because "…establishing what learners know (Vygotsky's 'zone of proximal development') connects to, builds on, and opens the way for creating new knowledge" (138). There are countless good reasons for using literacy narratives, but we must not see them as straightforward, uncomplicated, or ideologically free. In particular, college students' literacy narratives are intricately-wrought creations, and deciphering how students "live literacy," as Brandt puts it, can be a complex proposition.

For the Critical Analysis and Writing class, the literacy narrative was the first assignment, for the very reasons Williams and Kooy list. In addition, I hoped to use the narratives to set up students' conceptions of literacy as a social construction, similar to the ways Russel Durst and Richard Miller (in his "institutional autobiographies") use the

genre. As I read the students' narratives, not only for their merits but also for how Brandt's ideas of literacy as resource found their way into student writing, I was fascinated but how the students picked and chose from different memories for very specific reasons, and how they consciously crafted their narratives in response to ideologies so deeply ingrained that they felt no audience analysis was really necessary. In other words, the students approached the assignment knowing that shared cultural assumptions about the value of literacy were already in place and thus a touchstone for establishing a clear identity as a reader and writer.

Several common themes emerge in the students' literacy narratives. The first and perhaps most notable is that the students see their parents, family, and sometimes even peers as their primary literacy sponsors much more than they do their teachers. In many ways this is not surprising, since literacy (particularly reading) is a highly familial activity, with powerfully intimate connotations. However, parental and familial figures as literacy sponsors takes on much more complex significance considering Brandt's notions of literacy as resource. As she explains, "Literacy is a valued commodity in the U.S. economy, a key resource in gaining profit and edge. This value helps to explain, of course, the length to which people will go to secure literacy for themselves and their children" (21). Since so many of the students mention their future literacy and educational needs as an impetus for their post-secondary studies, the figures of parents and "the lengths" to which they will go to obtain a better future for their children take on even more importance.

The other crucial theme that surfaces is the very sophisticated ways that students construct identities for themselves in their formal (that is, essayistic) literacy narratives

handed in for evaluation. Bronwyn Williams has explored these identities in her work. She has noted that students' identities often fall into archetypal categories, such as hero, victim, and rebel (343—44). My students' literacy narratives also featured some recognizable archetypes, but what is more interesting is asking why the students feel the need to construct these identities. The notion of literacy as resource helps explain such a need. The literacy narrative essay, as opposed to the literacy narrative questionnaire, is a more public document, submitted for evaluation by yet another literacy sponsor: the teacher, acting as a credentialing agent. The students often revealed much more in their literacy narrative questionnaires, distributed as a brainstorming tool, a way to recollect experiences as evidence for their literacy narratives in essay form. The discrepancy illustrates the contextual sophistication that the students employ as they craft a very personal work with real literacy consequences for a new and little-known literacy sponsor. All these themes circle some common ground: while existing literacy sponsors exert a great deal of influence, few exceed the shadowy authority of a hypothetical job in a knowledge economy, and the college education (usually personified in a university faculty member) is the means, the gateway, to not only success, but achieving the dream that their parents have instilled in them for years. Moreover, the values of the gatekeeper become their values, to be lyrically detailed in a public document.

An ancillary theme that emerges is the omission of writing in student definitions of literacy at the early stage of the course. For many of the students, literacy equals reading, and often, literacy equals literary reading. Writing assumes a less-valued status in the students' discussions. This omission confirms Brandt's (1994) earlier work, in

which she dedicated an entire article in *CCC* to such a puzzling phenomenon. Brandt found that

> …people typically remembered their first reading experiences as pleasurable occasions, endorsed if not organized by adults. On the other hand, early writing experiences, particularly those set outside of school, were remembered as occurring out of the eye of public supervision and, often, involving feelings of loneliness, secrecy, and resistance.

Furthermore, Brandt found that parents tended to share in reading activities, but did not share in writing activities with their children. While some of these experiences found their way into student literacy narratives, more interesting is the privilege granted reading as opposed to writing, a privilege echoed in much literacy scholarship.[1] As a teacher, I did not point out this discrepancy to my students until a bit later in the semester, because I wanted to see if Brandt's observations were borne out by my students. In addition, in class I noticed similar tendencies in my own thinking, even with Brandt's work already in mind. Such frequent omissions certainly seem to point to deeply-ingrained cultural conceptions of what literacy means.

Writing teachers must understand these deeply-ingrained, culturally-forged issues as they go about their job of providing advanced literacy training to their students. Of the ten student literacy narratives examined in this chapter, only two extensively portrayed teachers in positive, formative ways. For some students, the impact of teachers was ambivalent. In all the narratives, however, parental and familial influence was far stronger, and a sense of responsibility to family appears often. Thus, teachers cannot ignore the pragmatic underpinnings of a student's college education, because many

families have to sacrifice to send their children to college. At the same time, however, in order to prove worthy to join a community of the educated, students must publicly demonstrate their conviction to all forms of literacy and learning through construction of very circumscribed identities.

## Literacy Sponsorship and Literacy Histories

The most poignant literacy narratives, such as those written by Paige and Caitlin, describe the influence of parents in their reading and writing development. For others, most notably Vanessa and Lauren, the intimacy of family figures largely in their memories. All the students, however, articulated the diverse ways in which their families and even peers affected their relationships with literacy.

Paige was a journalism major, and not surprisingly one of the strongest writers in the class. In addition, not only was her prose strong, but she also had an inquisitive and incisive intellect which her quiet voice belied. In Paige's family, the highest education level anyone else has attained is a two-year degree. Her mother earned a two-year degree to become a registered nurse, and her brother was working toward an associate's degree at the time she filled out her questionnaire. Her father and grandmother graduated from high school. Her father, though, continues to figure prominently in her memories and motivation for literacy learning. Because she is the first person in her family to go to a four-year college, she says that she "…see[s] how much more I can accomplish with proficient reading and writing skills."

Paige reports that she is pursuing her education because of the values her father instilled in her:

> He always told me not to do what he did, but to go to college instead so that I wouldn't have to work as hard as he did to get a great job. I feel that I owe it to him to make a better life for myself through education. I want to be able to gain knowledge and utilize that so that I can make him proud and make a better life than what I grew up in.

Paige recalls her first memory of reading as sitting on her father's lap and trying to read the newspaper with him. She was about four at the time. She says, "I can't forget sitting with my father because he has been so influential in my school-life. At the time, it was only play but now I recognize that he has always been urging me to be studious." That influence continued throughout Paige's schooling: "I think the person most influential in learning to read would be my father because he has always been a reader himself. Ever since I was 13 and he placed that first novel in my hand, I haven't been able to get enough."

In addition, peers closer to her age have also acted as literacy sponsors. One of her earliest memories of literacy instruction came at the hands of her brother's tutor. She remembers her "brother's tutor trying to help me learn the alphabet because I was so curious as to what they were doing." Paige describes a case in which there are multiple layers of sponsorship at work: that of her parents arranging a tutor for her brother, and the tutor in turn providing literacy learning for both Paige and her brother. Paige also indicates that her friends provide opportunities for reading and writing:

> I have written papers for projects with my friends as well as writing fiction stories with several. We have always passed around great new books for each other to read, too. I'm currently convincing one of my friends to

> continue reading the Sword of Truth series (since I already convinced him to read the first book.)

Paige reports elsewhere that much of her pleasure reading is in the form of fantasy/science fiction novels. In addition to these activities, Paige also lists other instances of decoding and encoding texts with friends:

> I've exchanged emails and talked through IM messages. The ones that I would consider literate would be the ones that are formal, such as writing papers, reading books, etc. E-mails and instant messages I'm not sure I would classify as literate because one can be very informal in how they write them. There can be missing punctuation, no capitalization, and slang but the point still gets across.

Paige values socially- and educationally-approved literacy practices over informal ones. That she considers formal, correctly-composed, and traditionally-recognized texts (books, papers) as literate indicates how highly she values a presentable final product over the more ephemeral texts of e-mail and instant messaging.

Caitlin was an enigma. In one-on-one conversations, she was immaculately polite and pleasant. In class, however, she proved to be one of the most resistant students to the discussions. It was difficult to lure her into discussion, but when she did, she often did so to disagree fundamentally with everyone else. She was clearly intelligent, but hesitated to use her intellect to question many of the assumptions we were interrogating in class. For Caitlin, things were the way they were for a reason, the reason was probably a good one, and to question why was an academic exercise of limited worth. Caitlin's parents got high school educations (her mother took one year of college,) but her brother at the time

she filled out her questionnaire was close to earning his master's degree in computer science. She mentions that her father earned his GED on "the very day" he married her mother. She says that her mother is "a very bright lady with a large…vocabulary." While her family seems to place some value in an education, she "[does] not believe going to college will determine how rich or successful one will become, but it certainly can't hurt." She remembers wanting to read so badly that she

> became jealous and hateful towards anyone who could already read....I wanted to be able to read signs while driving through town. My mother told me to be patient, my brother; that it was easy and once you learn, it's not a big deal. Well, to a person who can't read, it's everything.

That same influence on literacy exerted by her family was not so present in her teachers. She mentions that "[i]n public schooling, there are so many different people giving their own direction and input, to pinpoint a specific influential instructor is close to unmarkable." For Caitlin, literacy sponsorship seems to involve a greater time investment than the public school system can afford to any one teacher.

Like Paige, a parent holds particular standing in as a crucial literacy sponsor in Caitlin's development. In her literacy narrative, she opens by telling the story of how she began to learn to write:

> In the beginning, there was just me and my mom collectively, alone. She was the angel I depended on as my best friend, my caretaker. The same holds true today. We had a truly unique connection concerning our irresistable affection and my introduction to literacy. Before I began my formal education as a brand new kindergartener, I retain a specific happy

> memory of my angel sitting at the table with me, a blank sheet of white paper and bright crayons. This is where my life concerning literacy began. She was teaching me how to write my name, it began with a half circle.

As she mentioned in her literacy narrative questionnaire, her teachers did not seem to have the same impact. She says that throughout "elementary school, the bumpy path to reading had begun under the direction of approximately nine diverse teachers. All of which I recall only sporadically." Her mother continued to be the primary source of, if not direct instruction, then inspiration:

> Although I may only remember bits and pieces of their [her teachers'] instruction, my mother's vocabulary was and will always be a…large word bank in my eyes. She was the perfect person to assist me in spicing up an essay, poem, or short story. Mom has always been creative and knowledgeable with words and writing.

Such consistent, personal attention strikes Caitlin as crucial for literacy instruction, and led her to pursue a research project in home schooling later in the semester.

Vanessa was one of three students who chose to follow me from Critical Analysis and Writing I, the previous semester, to Critical Analysis and Writing II. She was an intensely quiet, retiring, and intelligent student. Though she felt free to speak often in class, one strained to hear what she had to say. For Vanessa, literacy practices center around family. Her parents both have college educations, but grandparents do not. However, Vanessa points out that they valued education highly. She reports that her mother's father worked for the United Nations and thus had to move often. Her mother had to switch schools frequently. Eventually, they sent Vanessa's mother and uncle to a

boarding school in England so that they could receive a more stable education. Vanessa recalls that although her mother is a nurse, she and her siblings thought she was a teacher, because she

> bought us lots of writing and reading work books for us to do for "fun." She had her own list of books she thought we should read during summer and would give us prompts to write about in our "creative journals."

Despite all the support for her literacy, Vanessa notes that she was not a very adept reader. In contrast to her classmates, who seemed to love to read, she "dreaded it." She recalls that she was a very shy child, with a "soft voice and was often told to speak up." Indeed, in ENGL 1413, she was the quietest student. She recalled, too, that when she went to the library with her sisters, she was "alarmed" to see how much faster they could read.

To remedy this fear, Vanessa's father began taking her to the library to let her pick out books, and they would read them together:

> …I'd read a chapter and then he'd read a chapter. He let me pick out the books I wanted to read in the library and then we would read together. At first, it was frustrating because I had a hard time reading, but after a while I really enjoyed it. My dad must have really valued reading because he listened to me read the entire Babysitter's Club series.

Vanessa reports that her proficiency improved so quickly that she "became so absorbed in the books that I would forget when it was my turn to stop reading."

Vanessa's siblings played almost as crucial a role in her literacy practices as her parents. She reports that she and her sisters would make up stories together. While this

practice has not continued, they still share books, because "we have the same taste in books. I think it is safe to say that Barnes and Nobles is…one of our favorite stores, so we often buy lots of books together and then share them with each other." More importantly, though, she sees her brother as someone who has benefited from literacy in special ways: "My brother is deaf and I know how much being able to read and write has helped him succeed tremendously in life."

Vanessa's memories are a bit unusual in that she recalls large amounts of writing in her family's literacy practices. In addition to the stories she and her sisters created, her mother instigated a lot of writing for Vanessa:

> While my dad helped show me just how interesting and exciting reading could be, my mom helped me with the mechanics. She bought reading comprehension and vocabulary workbooks for me to work on at home. Each day I would study new words and a write in my own "creative journal" my mother constructed for me. In this "creative journal" she would write introductions for a story like, "One hot summer day…" and I was to finish the tale. Although I found the "school" my mom had set up for me at home to be annoying at times, it truly improved my real school life. Reading and writing as well as completing worksheets, projects, and other activities became so much easier.

Vanessa's family, particularly her parents, demonstrates the lengths parents will go to as literacy sponsors. In their efforts to secure the literacy resources they deem so valuable, Vanessa's parents went to notable lengths to obtain the materials for reading and writing,

and also invested a great deal of time to ensure Vanessa would have the opportunities school-based literacy offered.

Lauren, when she took the class, she was the only graduating senior. A perceptive and intelligent Political Science and Russian major, she was an honors student who asked to miss class toward the end of the semester to present her honors thesis at a national conference. In addition, she contributed fascinating insights into the discussion of Paolo Freire by drawing interesting connections to her studies of Marxism in her Political Science classes. She identifies herself as the third generation in her family to complete a college education. She says that upon graduating from high school, the question was not whether she would go to college, but where. In addition, not only was reading and writing encouraged, but inquisitiveness was viewed as a natural and healthy impulse. Like Vanessa, family figures prominently in Lauren's memories of reading. Her first memories are ones of her father reading to her and her brothers. Lauren cherishes these memories for two reasons: they influenced her desire to learn and, perhaps more importantly, because "it was time spent with my dad and brothers." Her older brother as an important role model as well: "As a child I always strove to be like him and he pushed me to learn to read and write just like he was doing in school." As a result of her efforts to learn to read, she recalls that she knew how to read before she began school. She also remembers her mother forcing her to go play outside and get away from her reading for a while. A whole research project, I think, could be dedicated to this clever literacy sponsorship ploy by parents: make reading slightly naughty and forbidden, and reading becomes a sneaky pleasure—the best kind.

Two other sponsors that Lauren remembers are the library and an advanced reading group in grade school. She remembers attending her public library's reading program during the summer and special programs at school for more experienced readers: "In second grade I was placed in an advanced reading group. One of only two or three students in the group, I remember being able to read extra stories and take quizzes to advance on the 'skills levels.'" While Lauren sees school as an important literacy sponsor, the teachers involved are murkier figures. The programs themselves, both at the library (the librarian does not make an appearance either) and at school, and the opportunities they provided, live on as key influences for Lauren.

Arianna spoke the least of anyone in the class that semester. She would contribute only when asked, and with a great deal of discomfort. Arianna reports that although her parents and grandparents did not graduate from college, they all obtained high paying jobs. She also insists that her being in the first generation in her family to go to college "has no effect" on her. All the same, her parents, particularly her father, played an influential role in modeling literacy. Like many for her colleagues, she off-handedly mentions that school was the most influential agent in how she learned to read and write, but she revealed no memories of school in her literacy narrative questionnaire. On the other hand, she had two clear memories of literacy experiences with her father. For example, her first memory of reading was of her father reading *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* to her. "The experience is memorable," she says, "because I was spending time with my dad." In addition, she also has memories of looking up to her father because he was a reporter for the local newspaper.

Lindsey was another student who followed me from the previous semester to Critical Analysis and Writing II. Though clearly vivacious and friendly, she was also very serious about her studies—never a late assignment, never a complaint about class. Lindsey at the time she completed her questionnaire was the only person in her family pursuing a post-secondary education. Her sister started college but did not finish, and her father received an associate's degree, but everyone else in her family finished their educations with their high school diplomas. However, Lindsey mentions that her parents "have always emphasized the importance of a higher education" and are committed to "do anything to help me in that regard." Like many of her colleagues, an older sibling acted as an impetus for literacy learning. "My sister is 3 years older than me," she recalls, "and I always wanted to do whatever she was doing. When she would practice her spelling words I would practice my name and other small words."

Kara was an elementary education major, and clearly had completed enough coursework to be familiar with a great deal of thought in educational scholarship. In fact, at one point in the semester she expressed that much of the work we were doing in literacy research was well known to her, and she assumed that everyone had already asked these questions and done this inquiry. Kara, in her questionnaire, does not see a connection between her family's level of educational achievement and her literacy values. As she states,

> When it comes to reading and writing it is not so much my families educational background but the fact that my parents have been very supportive….My household growing up and now has embraced learning. The entire family loves to learn and values an always challenging mindset.

Considering that most of Kara's family has achieved at least a college education, it is unsurprising that her family culture valued education. One set of grandparents graduated from college. Both parents graduated from college, and her father holds a masters degree. Kara notes with some pride that her brother attended "the number one engineering college in the nation" and is currently working on his master's degree. It is surprising, though, that Kara sees little connection between her highly educated family and an emphasis on education.

Kara was home-schooled until the seventh grade, so her family served as literacy sponsor on another level as well: "Because I was homeschooled everything was pretty much one on one. I would read to my younger sister and both parents would always read to me and all my siblings." This close family connection to education led them another community sponsor that many students did not mention: the library. Kara describes the role that the library played in her development:

> Growing up my family loved the library. I was homeschooled until the seventh grade so we would do a lot of our school work at the library. I was always surrounded by books and still am. I remember watching Reading Rainbow, going to storytime at the library and constantly having someone read to me.

In both the questionnaire and the literacy narrative, Kara stresses reading over writing, with the exception of her passion for writing children's books. She is working with a friend to write a children's book and search for a publisher. In addition to the satisfaction of writing these books (she's written four and illustrated one), Kara sees a social mission in this work related to her studies as an education major: "Reading so much children's

literature caused me to realize that I too could participate in aiding not only children's literacy, but also helped me to establish a love for literature at a young age." Writing, for Kara, is a way to imporve appreciation for reading. As Brandt notes, writing has often been used as a means to boost readership, and is often not seen as a worthy end in itself as literacy practice.

Brigid was a dynamic force in class. She had curly, wine-colored hair that she tossed about as she spoke. Very vocal, she contributed a great deal in class discussions, and seemed baffled that other members were not as involved. Brigid's parents were both highly educated. Her father held a doctorate in Pharmacy and her mother earned two bachelor's degrees, one in Biology and one in Medical Technology. She describes both her parents as "extremely intelligent" and that she was "raised on books." She says that "[r]eading and writing are my passions and I thank my parents for that." She remembers that her parents "…have either been reading to me or urging me to read on my own. I started writing at a very young age and my parents greatly encouraged me and they still continue to do so."

Another literacy sponsor for Brigid was her grandmother. "My earliest memory of reading," she recalls, "at least the most vivid, is from when I was about 6." She continues,

> I read a book called Land of the Unicorns that my grandmother had bought me. I loved it. I read the book so many times that the binding broke and all the pages fell out. I made my mother go buy me another copy and read that one a couple of times, just for good measure.

Friends and peers have also shared literacy experiences with Brigid. She describes a game she played with her friends in which one person would start a story on a note and it would get passed around all day with each person adding a sentence or two.

Gabe, like Vanessa and Lindsey, joined me from the previous semester. Like Brigid, he also contributed extensively to class discussions. However, he seemed less baffled at others' reticence and more annoyed. He was a very frequent visitor to my office. Most of the time, we would chat about classroom issues in the elevator up to the office, but he often stayed for at least half an hour, talking about politics and current events. He once said that he could barely count on both hands the people he considered worthy of speaking at length with, but that I was one of them. I admired his confidence in himself and his abilities, which was not at all unfounded. Both of Gabe's parents have Ph.Ds. Although Gabe admits he was "quite unaware at the time," his parents' doctorates "profoundly shaped" his childhood, largely in his view that "being a highly capable writer, reader and learner [is] something that should be important to most everyone." While he views both parents as the most influential people in his literacy development, his memories of reading in particular center on his mother:

> I remember reading through a children's book with my mother, she was very proud when I read a page back to her. I can't remember how old I was but I can remember how delighted I was that she was proud of me. After that she had to let me stay up "late" to do it.

One book holds a special place in Gabe's memories of reading: "…my mother read a book to me called 'I'll love you forever.'[2]…As a child, having my mother read that book to me meant a great deal. So much that even after I'd learned to read I still insisted that

she read it to me for many years." As with many of his colleagues, reading often holds a deeply emotional connotation with family, security, and belonging.

As a result of such early reading experiences, Gabe, like Lauren, remembers knowing ("more or less") how to read and write before beginning school. Gabe's memories of his literacy development are not as detailed as his awareness of his current practices. He notes that reading and writing is largely a private activity for him, and has been "for as long as [he] can remember." However, he mentions that many of his friends do not read much for pleasure anyway. The only exception he recalls is that in the fifth grade he wrote a series of books with a friend. He also reports writing down thoughts and feelings, but not necessarily for public consumption. "I use writing as a tool," Gabe says, "for expressing the thoughts I cannot tell anyone." Reading, on the other hand, is often representative of the vagaries of his passions and imagination: "Every so often I'll find a book I really want to read, but after I finish it it can be a few months before I find the next one. Usually I'll only read things that really interest me, I never read just for the sake of it."

Kelsie's presence in class was always a bit disconcerting, because she bore a strikingly close resemblance to one of my nieces. Therefore, there were many times I had to pause and make sure I called her by the correct name. Kelsie's family is also highly educated. Her mother holds a bachelors and an associate's degree. Her father has progressed from bachelors to masters and was at the time she filled out the questionnaire completing a doctorate. One of her grandfathers holds a Ph.D in physics. Kelsie, though, feels a responsibility to succeed in her education not only from her elders, but as the eldest child; she reports she feels it is her duty to act as a role model for her younger

siblings. She credits her mother, though, for being the most influential in her literacy learning. “She’s the one,” Kelsie says, “that introduced me to the genres that I enjoy reading and she was always a great help with homework that involved writing.”

Her friends provided another opportunity for writing particularly when Kelsie was about twelve years old. She recalls,

> I used to write songs with my friends or we’d write and perform scripts for our ridiculous movies. I was always the one that looked for ways to make the songs or scripts better. Now I find ways to help my friends improve their essays and I really enjoy it.

A similar reciprocation exists with books, Kelsie says. She and her friends often exchange books. Oddly, college provides even more opportunities for writing, and not only in the form of schoolwork. Kelsie’s questionnaire revealed a different angle to the literacy sponsorship college life provides, that of the scholarship essay. The agencies providing scholarships, and the essays they ask applicants to write, are an unexamined source of sponsorship, particularly by those hopeful applicants.

The students brought up several interesting sponsors outside their families. In addition to teachers, other notable community sponsors appeared in their accounts. Kelsie, for instance, also brings up a famous literacy sponsor, Pizza Hut and its Book-It program. Kelsie explains, “After reading X many books, we’d get a personal pan pizza for free. It was a nice incentive, but I didn’t need it. Still, free pizza is just not something a little kid says no to.” While this program has had its share of critics, it is still going strong, and many people hold fond memories of the program. Kelsie is careful, though, to make it clear that the reading, not the pizza was the main incentive for the program.

Kelsie spends some time in her questionnaire revealing memories of the role teachers played in her literacy development. Most teachers remain nameless in the questionnaire, and Kelsie is ambivalent as to their contribution. She mentions the encouragement of a seventh-grade teacher during a state-mandated essay evaluation, but

> All of the encouragement I received from her had been smothered out by other teachers until high school. I finally found an English teacher that I could talk to and that understood me. My favorite teacher was my senior English teacher Mr. John Erwin. I spent a lot of time writing scholarship essays with him.

The presence of scholarship essays resurfaces in conjunction with a favorite English teacher. It is noteworthy that what Kelsie remembers most is writing scholarship essays, not more "literary" forms, particularly since Kelsie's definition of literate behavior is, at this point, quite traditional:

> Any reading or writing of text messages or e-mail is probably illiterate. There really isn't much to the though process in those mediums. However, I do consider the past few fiction novels I've read to be literary. It takes a continuous stream of thought to connect everything in a well-written novel.

Under this definition, the scholarship essays that Kelsie as written under her English teacher's tutelage may squeak by as literate, but only barely. Kelsie seems to favor the cultural literacy paradigm as the standard for literate behavior, particularly since she values expression in the writing she does for her free time. "Writing is my outlet for expression," she reports. "It allows me to express anger, express love and gratitude…"

She continues that she uses reading and writing for "entertainment and as stress relievers" when she has the time, in addition to more mundane purposes such as "communication to and from teachers, family, and friends."

Lindsey is a bit unusual in that her memories of literacy sponsoring events in school are fairly specific. For example, she names her most influential teacher, who taught English during her 7th- and 8th-grade years. However, academic contests hold a conspicuous place in Lindsey's memories. She recalls the pride she felt winning a penmanship award and "thought it was the most wonderful thing that could happen to a person." She also won in her school's spelling bee in the fourth through sixth grades and competed at the state level. When thinking about literacy activities with her friends, Lindsey recalls another influential contest: "In 8th grade a friend and I wrote and researched a huge project for the History Day competition. We spent months on it, won 1st at districts, made it to finals at state." Lindsey's memories point out that academic contests are a frequently forgotten literacy sponsor for young children and their peers. Lindsey reports, however, that she does little writing with peers currently. Most of her writing is done for school assignments. The exception is that she and her friends do help each other out with peer editing for papers. Outside of school, Lindsey reports reading "a lot of philosophy when I have the time. John Rawls, Rousseau, John Stuart Mill, and John Locke are the most common."

Although Lindsey discusses the impact of a few teachers, she continually returns to her family's educational history as the momentum for her post-secondary learning:

> No one in my family has completed a college education and that works as enormous inspiration for me. It fuels my desire to not just obtain a degree,

> but to do so with above average grades and a plethora of new knowledge. Moreover, by observing the life that my parents lead, I have had the opportunity to experience first-hand how difficult life can be without a college degree.

Kelsie and Lindsey depict some positive influence from select teachers, but such experiences are limited and neither spends much time writing about teachers. Only Paige and Brigid devote much time and space to writing about English teachers, and are the only ones who write about English teachers shaping their literate lives in exceptionally positive ways.

Paige's recurring concerns with correctness, for instance, show the influence of a noteworthy literacy sponsor, her high school journalism teacher: "The most influential [person] in learning to write would have been my Journalism/English teacher in highschool. He never let any mistakes go unedited and he taught me more about writing than probably anyone else." Paige could not help but learn her lessons on the importance of sentence-level issues from her teacher's comments: "I wrote news stories for Journalism and they were plastered with red by the time they went through the process. Looking back on those, I could see what I did wrong and learn to improve my writing skills." Paige is a Journalism major, and so her immediate career plans also act as a kind of sponsorship. She knows her literacy is her career, and thus she does not have to struggle to apply her writing and reading instruction to her career plans: "Reading and writing are of the utmost importance. My career basically hinges on my ability to read & write."

Interestingly, Brigid, in her literacy narrative questionnaire, does not pinpoint many significant specific teachers. While Brigid believes that her English teachers have been influential in her literacy learning, she could not name an influential teacher in her early years, despite claiming that she had "extraordinary teachers." She insists, though, that "good schooling throughout my life really is what developed my good reading habits." The exception, however, was her 2nd grade teacher: "I remember reading kids books in my 2nd grade class. The reason that it is so easy to recall is because my 2nd grade teacher was crazy. She turned our entire classroom into a Mexican pueblo. She just was a little different."

Because Brigid is an English major with a creative writing emphasis, reading and writing skills have much more discernable applications for her than many other college students. "Reading and writing are of the utmost importance," Brigid says, because "I want to literally make a career out of them." In her efforts to make that career, she describes what she would like to take form her college education:

> I hope to further my own knowledge have the brains and discipline to be a published author and share my art with the world….hopefully a better command of the English language and its usage. The breadth or knowledge to write profoundly and to appreciate profound writing.

Brigid describes the kind of cultural literacy that Hirsch urges, and a kind of literacy that could benefit her in her efforts to become a published author. It is noteworthy to see that a "command of the English language and its usage" is more clearly defined than her notion of what "profound writing" comprises. At this point in the semester, for Brigid as

with Paige, writing exercising an above-average competence with language is valued, and critical thinking has not yet made an appearance as a component of good writing.

Once she reached the essay version of her literacy narrative, however, her depiction of her English teachers changes. Brigid is the only student who dedicated her entire literacy narrative to discussing her teachers. While she begins by mentioning her and her parents' love for reading, she says that she had no "true desire to read" until she was "placed into…honors English class" in eighth grade. Her teacher, who was "tiny and in her 50s with flaming red hair," became her first literacy sponsor in school. "She made reading real to us," Brigid recalls, "When she talked about it, she didn't make it seem like something we had to do to make us smarter but something we had to so to make us better people." It was in this class that Brigid realized that she wanted to pursue literature seriously:

> She made us sign up for a day every week to bring a poem and read it to the class....She kissed me on the forehead when I brought in Langston Hughes' "The Negro Speaks of Rivers." By the end of the year we were begging just to read poetry and nothing else. At the end of the year, she made us read a book that changed my life. We read *Fahrenheit 451,* by Ray Bradbury, aloud in class and she cried at the end. It was not the idea of a world without books that affected her so, but the devotion to them at the end. At that moment, I decided to throw myself headfirst into literature and never look back.

Brigid's teachers embraced a form of literacy that hearkens back to earlier forms, such as recitation/report literacy, in which how and what one reads contributes to one's moral development.

The first years of high school, Brigid remembers, were dry ones for reading. "My love of reading had not diminished," she reports, "but put on the back burner to make room for the more pressing matters of boyfriends and teenage drama." Moreover, Brigid suffered the ministrations of "mediocre English teachers" who not only did not "inspire [her] to read or write," but "never really taught [her] anything either." During this time, though, she briefly found a literacy sponsor in her assistant principal, who helped her found the Poetry Club at her school. Despite her involvement in that club, Brigid recalls feeling more excited at her upcoming senior year than her class work until she met her Honors English III teacher:

> The first day of class she introduced herself as Satan and encouraged us to call her that from here on out. [She] is the single most influential person I have ever met. She never stayed on topic. She cursed and raged in class, nothing being sacred to her cynical, liberal, democratic mind. She gave me my first "C" on a paper, which annoyed me to no end.

In this English teacher, Brigid finds a literacy sponsor that encourages not only the cultural literacy that Brigid values, but an understanding of a "higher" literacy, one that also stresses critical thinking:

> We learned to question and to really see things for what they are. There was no sugar-coating in her world, so we never really got the easy way

out. Without her writing bootcamp, I wouldn't be the writer I am today. Without her unrelenting reality, I wouldn't be an English major now.

Through her teacher, Brigid comes to admire the thinking processes that arise from a "cynical, liberal, democratic" mind that "questions" and "sees things for what they are." Despite all that, she still tends to value the cultural literacy she experienced early. As a creative writing major, she found in Honors English III teacher "the literary icon that I needed." Brigid enrolled in her teacher's creative writing class, and she says that her teacher "is still my biggest fan, and we are still in contact." This kind of intense literacy sponsorship by a teacher is not often found in the literacy narratives submitted in this class.

### Identity Construction in Literacy Narratives

Once the students progressed to the literacy narrative as an actual essay to be evaluated, their writing changed fundamentally. That is, their questionnaires were full of information about themselves, rife with hidden details. Their literacy narratives in essay form, however, were far more circumspect. The narratives became carefully worded, edited, and constructed extensions of the students they thought I wanted them to be. As a far more public document, the narratives became an opportunity for the students to show their best face to another, if ambivalently situated, literacy sponsor—their college writing teacher. In these narratives, many of the identities that Williams identifies very purposefully emerge. The students present themselves as cherishing, for the most part, their cultural and personal literacies; in addition, the undercurrent of the "knowledge as power" concept (i.e., economic and social power) remains ever present.

Once Paige embarks on her literacy narrative, for example, she downplays her future career plans in favor of a lusciously-rendered essay on the pleasures of reading for her. She asserts that "[r]eading is a matter of retreat into a field of pleasure, yet I also use reading for enhancing general knowledge and, at times, grudgingly, for coursework studies as well." Not surprisingly, her father quickly appears as a central sponsoring figure in Paige's pleasure reading. "The first time," Paige recalls, "I can remember reading for novelty reasons was after wandering through a book store with my father while in search of new paperbacks for him to peruse." Reading fantasy novels, which "teeter on the brink of addictiveness" in her life, provides "an outlet for constant stresses" and a means of escape. She says that "…realizing possibilities that may not be exactly viable in this world is what brings my imagination alive and enables me to escape, if only for a few feeble moments."

Paige also values reading to gain knowledge, such as her collection of historical novels. Because "[w]e can no longer just remove ourselves from our rooms and look out upon a Pre-Civil War township, or walk through a crowd of yelling white students in Little Rock, Arkansas," Paige notes that "…books offer an experience that is remotely found in other brands of literature." Moreover, she insists that "[i]n order that we might grow as a society and as persons individually, I believe that reading for knowledge purposes is highly imperative."

Paige somehow separates reading for knowledge, which seems to be voluntary, with reading for school coursework: "Although I relish in reading fiction and value reading for the gain of knowledge, I am also requested to read for coursework in school."

Tellingly, it is only in this section of her literacy narrative that she mentions writing at all, and her father reappears as a crucial literacy sponsor:

> He sees a post-high school education as crucial to a more fulfilling and beneficial existence and that view has caused me to want something better for myself as well. The work ethic and mental stamina that he has infused me with causes me to do my course duties though they may seem insignificant at the moment. I realize that in the future, I may need those skills which are taught to me and I would be all the better to be attentive to reading and writing.

While Paige can express how her studies can apply to her career as a journalist, she still invests in soaking up the knowledge she receives in classes because of its potential future value, though it is not clear if either Paige or her father can fully articulate such potential value. Literacy and knowledge are bankable assets, the future worth of which is not completely known. All the same, Paige puts a great deal of faith in "the discretion of professors for the sake of a skill they foresee us utilizing." There is a sense in Paige's comments that students need to bank as much knowledge into their heads, even if they don't yet know why, to prepare for their futures.

In her literacy narrative, Arianna sees reading as a medium of education. As she puts it, "[r]eading is very important because it allows people to get an education. Knowing how to read allows people to do well in school, which would allow them to get a better career and make more money." In other words, literacy is the means of access for the skills employers value, instead of literacy itself being the skill that employers value, as Deborah Brandt argues. If students see literacy as a step toward crucial skills, rather

than the crucial skill in a knowledge-based economy, they probably will not get all they need from a writing class.

However, Arianna chooses not to focus her essay on the advancement potential of literacy. Instead, she takes her ideas about the recuperative nature of literacy and develops them: "I read books because it helps me relax, it teaches me life lessons, and it helps me escape from the realities of the real world." The biggest benefit of reading for her, at least the one she mentions most in both her questionnaire and literacy narrative, is its usefulness for relaxation. She describes sitting in a comfortable chair or lying on her bed and "just get[ting] engulfed in the story":

> When I was in elementary school I would read when there was nothing on television or before I went to bed and I do the same thing now. Reading also helps me relax when I am tired of studying. I think reading a book, other than a story for school, seems less like work and more like entertainment.

It is difficult to determine from Arianna's passage what is more important: the draining, school-based reading that hopefully will translate into marketable skills, or the soothing reading for entertainment purposes.

In addition, literacy figures in Arianna's life as a didactic agent. She reads to gain life lessons:

> For example, *To Kill a Mockingbird* taught me not to judge people by what other people say about them. Some books can even give a reader new ideas about religion or God. *Inherit the Wind* taught me that religion and science can coexist. I believe young children should read a lot of books

> because the lessons taught in books can help them through life. When I was younger I read *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* and it taught that Christmas is about more than presents; it is about family and giving. Recently I read *1984* and I learned to appreciate the freedom I have by living in the United States….It does not matter what age you are a book can teach you something new.

Arianna's description of this form of literacy indicates that her previous literacy learning conformed to Myers' "recitation/report" literacy which emphasized what moral lessons one could learn from a work. Reading as a moral exercise figures largely in Arianna's vision of what literacy is to accomplish.

Arianna also values reading's escapist quality. She lushly describes how a book can transport a reader to another reality:

> When I was younger I read books like *Where the Wild Things Are* to escape into a colorful imaginary world. I think that book sparked my interest in books about far-off places, so when I got older I read books like The Lord of the Rings trilogy to escape into a medieval, magical land. Both of these books take the reader to a weird, but fascinating world; a world that is so much different from the world we live in.

Arianna insists, as well, that books are much better than their adaptations, because readers "can imagine the characters and their personalities," thus making the reading experience more interesting. "I think everyone needs an escape from their lives," Arianna argues, which adds to the relaxing effect she mentions earlier in her essay.

Arianna concludes her narrative by distinguishing herself from the aliterate masses by considering the negative attitudes to reading she perceives:

> Reading does not have to be a chore like some people think it is. I believe when children are in elementary school they lose interest in reading because they are given tests and essays over what they learned from a book, so they see reading as work….I also do not understand how people can not enjoy reading. My friends tell me that they do not have time or they do not find books interesting. What they do not realize is they are missing out on a lot of lessons and experiences that come from reading books. Last year I even made a list of all the books I read, so I could look back at the list and remember some of the lessons or inspiring quotes I learned from the book.

Interestingly, Arianna's conclusion becomes one of the very things she values so much about reading: she gives us a life lesson. Thus, her musings should perhaps not necessarily be read as platitudinous or currying favor, but as a demonstration of what literacy should accomplish. Even so, we cannot look at Arianna's essay without noticing that she carefully toes the party line on literacy, and celebrates the conservative nature of literacy to an extent that exceeds many of her fellow students.

Arianna's values of literacy often resemble Myers' description of "recitation/report literacy" in that she portrays reading as "good for you." As she reports, "I try to read a book a month but with school that goal is hard to meet. I love to read as much as I can because it kind of makes me feel accomplished when I finish a 400 or 500 page book." Arianna's reading habits are a bit prescriptive; read a book a month and

count yourself cultured. Her values also reflect a very canonical sensibility. “If I had to pick a specific genre,” she ponders, “I would say the classics; books written before the 1900s.” Older is better, for Arianna, and as she mentioned earlier, the longer the better. In fact, how she defines literate activity tends toward the canonical as well: “Novels and school reading are probably the most literate because you have to think deep when you read them.” Along the same lines, she reports not writing very much because she is “not very creative.” The writing that truly counts, for Arianna, is complex and “deep,” worthy of study in a classroom.

Even so, the form of literacy that she values is not the primary reason for a post-secondary education. As she says, “I am pursuing my education because you have to have a college degree to get noticed for jobs. I hope to get a strong education so I can get a job I enjoy.” Arianna, like many of her colleagues, has a difficult time articulating the skills that a “strong education” provides that is supposed to translate to an “enjoyable” job.

Kara’s literacy narrative deals entirely with reading, except a brief discussion of writing children’s books with her friends. Her introductory paragraph sets the tone for her essay:

> Reading allows a person to delve into another world to live another life if only for an instant. It can shape thoughts and bring about change. Reading allows normal every day people to become something great in that split second between words. The ability to read has affected my past, present and future.

Kara views reading much like Paige and others do, in that one of its main benefits is the escape from reality. This love of storytelling extends to Kara's description of how she began reading:

> Growing up surrounded by books allowed for literacy to develop early on in my life. I have been tearing books a part since I was four years old. Legend has it that one day I picked up a book I had never seen, and read it out loud to my mother when I was four years old. This sparked my love for reading despite my young age.

Kara admitted in her questionnaire that she did not actually remember this event, and thus must depend on family "legend" to relate the story. However, her fascination with books comes across clearly, from "tearing books a part" to reading indicates that her family made sure books were always available for whatever type of play Kara wanted to explore.

For Kara, creativity is not necessarily a function of writing; she associates it more often with reading in her essay. The creation Kara focuses on is more related to the work a reader undertakes while experiencing a text. As she explains,

> Books allow for me to gain knowledge while keeping my over active imagination engaged. My creativity is fed by getting caught up in a story. Stories with some type of history behind them seem to attract me the most. Charles Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities*, Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Christo*, and J.R. Tolkien's novels offer so much to the reader through intricate plot twists, character development, and elaborate settings.

Later, Kara insists that "[l]iteracy is a necessity. I allows not only for my daily life to occur, but also allows for a creative outlet." Kara seems to value the creativity involved in constructing mental images while reading as much, if not more, than writing something new.

Like Arianna, Kara values reading for its ability to help readers learn something. However, Kara zeroes in on reading's ability to help it practitioners become more compassionate and understanding of other people and their lives:

> Reading provides the means to see something from another perspective. Delving into another world allows you to see how different character act and in most cases think. Great literature allows the reader to learn from others mistakes much more rapidly than reality….Realizing that all people do not think like me has led me to be a more accepting person.

Not only is a greater capacity for compassion a benefit of reading literature, but Kara sees that reading has the added benefit of avoiding potential pitfalls, a sort of literary "heads up." It is noteworthy that Kara discusses reading exclusively in terms of literature. Literacy, for Kara, is firmly ensconced in the paradigm of cultural literacy.

In two very strategic locations in her narrative, Kara constructs an identity for herself as one unusually committed to reading. The first instance is on the first page, after the story of her early entrance into the world of literacy. She asserts that "[t]hough time is scarce, reading is something that to this day I really enjoy. It may seem out of the ordinary, yet I love to get lost in a book." Kara, by referring to herself as someone out of the ordinary, separates herself from an unnamed and aliterate mass who clearly do not love reading as much as she does. The other instance is in her last sentence: "Though my

personal view of reading may be skewed by an abnormal beginning, I greatly value the place reading has in my life." Kara reminds us of her precociousness and early start at reading as a way, again, to distinguish herself from the "others" that she suspects academics envision when they think of America: illiterate, aliterate, and anti-intellectual. Kara plants these sentences as a way to assure us that she is not one of them.

For Caitlin, literacy is an intensely private activity. Caitlin's current literacy practices do not include activities with peers. She notes that "[i]f I wasn't souly responsible for reading and homework, I let others do it for me and never learned anything. Now, I don't read, or write with peers at all." However, she does mention a good deal of reading for personal reasons. For instance, she reports reading "personal wartime stories" (she has family members in the military) and taking notes on the Bible. In addition,

> Periodically I write down my dreams and keep a personal journal. Though I have never written down my absolute true thoughts and feelings on any subject for fear of someone (anyone) getting a hold of these personally priceless papers.

Caitlin comments echo the research of Deborah Brandt, who notes that writing is differently valued in American life than reading, and writing is often cloaked in secrecy. Writing, as Brandt found, can be used for purposes unrelated to the authors' intent. Thus, her respondents were often careful to control the writing they produced.

Caitlin is a studio art major, and her educational interests reflect many of her attitudes toward her non-art-related courses:

> In my studio art education I want to improve my skill. Skill is an important additive when one already has talent. Why take a math class when you will never use what you've learned? Because it's developing learning skills and techniques for larger, more ambitious personal hurdles to come, in life. One never stops learning.

While Caitlin quickly asserts that the courses not in her major do have value, her previous comments cast some doubt as to how strongly she holds such beliefs. However, she also swiftly notes that she can use reading and writing to help her explain or describe her art. "Reading and writing," she says, "can open many doors for people to explore and discover hidden meanings, or even untold stories."

Caitlin is unusual among her peers in that her literacy narrative does not include a sizable percentage dedicated to pondering the importance of literacy in one's future success and all-around fulfillment. Instead, the satisfaction she sees in literacy is the record one can keep of one's life:

> …my dad has encouraged me to keep a journal of my day to day life….To keep a log of your personal life is to maintain your individual story keeping it alive through the ages. If it is never known on a wide spectrum of scholars or printed in a book held in a massive library, at least it can be kept in the family. He says, "Besides, you may never know where your story will end up." Some of the greatest stories ever told were about people's lives lived….If Anne Frank had not kept daily writings of her young life, her remarkable story may never have been told, never been known.

All the same, she also stresses that she takes care not to reveal everything she thinks or feels, because such writing could always find an audience, intended or not.

Like many of her colleagues, Kelsie transforms her literacy narrative into a skillfully crafted portrayal of herself as an outsider, in that she sets up nameless others who do not value literacy as she does, thus defining herself in opposition to those apathetic to literacy. "There have been many times," she reports, "when I have found myself concerned with the literacy of another human being. It's difficult for me to accept that things like reading and writing are not valued by some people at all." Thus, we know that not only is Kelsie committed to a literacy project such as a writing class, but she is willing to take up the banner to recruit others to the cause.

Moreover, Kelsie portrays herself as so committed to literacy that she is of two minds as to the effect that literacy has on her life:

> Ever since I was a little kid, my parents and teachers constantly encouraged me to work on my reading and writing. This constant encouragement left a lasting impression that has been both a blessing and a curse. It has been a blessing because it has given me the gift of knowledge and with each day I'm able to continue and grow. The curse is the annoyance that comes with each person that delays a learning experience because of their illiteracy.

Kelsie's last move is a surprising one, in that one would expect the curse to be either not enough time to read and write as much as she would like, or that she cannot rise to the heights that her aspirations would inspire. Instead, "illiterates" are the bur under the blanket of her dedication to literacy. However, Kelsie reports that she has found ways to

transform this "curse" to her own benefit: "Gradually I'm learning to use my frustration with my peers…as a way to fuel my thirst for knowledge." To be fair, Kelsie expresses frustration not only with her peers, but admits that she finds reading and writing difficult at times as well. However, she reports dealing with her struggles in sentences pregnant with meaning for a teacher:

> My goal in college is to obtain a degree and I know that in order to do that and be able to put my degree to use, I need to work on the way I use my literacy abilities. With this realization, I've begun reading everything and writing every chance I get. Even though it's difficult, I've learned to accept the thoughts and advice of others on my writing skills.

Like many of her peers, Kelsie incorporates direct messages to her teacher through the medium of a literacy narrative. The form, in its academic manifestation at least, offers a sometimes irresistible opportunity either to let the teacher know what good students they will be, or, in the case of students like Caitlin, warn teachers that they better be on their toes—the student will be watching for ivory-tower sophistry.

As a political science and Russian major, Lauren describes her unique perspective on learning to read, because she has had to learn to read again as an adult:

> Because I have had to "re-learn" how to read—this time in Russian—I have discovered the necessity of understanding a language; how each small step toward literacy—mastering a new alphabet, comprehending new words—shapes how the world around you is viewed. Each step toward fluency is a key that opens new doors to the world around.

As Lauren suggests, the experience of learning to read the Cyrillic alphabet gives her a more sympathetic and sensitive point of view not only for those learning how to read, but also for the power of functional literacy as a survival skill.

Even so, in her introductory paragraph, Lauren constructs an identity for herself as an "old school" literacy learner:

> …I learned to read during the late 1980s. Without the gadgets and tools of computers, "talking books," educational videos and toys that parents now rely on to encourage their children to get a "head start" on their education, I was restricted to two most fundamental utensils: parents and books. Rather than the gimmicks of lights and colors, the simplicity of standard books and the devotion that my parents put into my education taught me value and *then* the entertainment of reading. Unlike the tools used in learning today, immediate reward wasn't what I was reacting to, I learned the worth.

One imagines Lauren next launching into a story of her walking to school in ten feet of snow, uphill both ways, and being damn grateful for it. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine the 1980s being the good old days of education. However, Lauren plants that passage at the beginning of her narrative to complement her final sentence, "Today, I acknowledge how crucial reading is; it is not only a tool for learning, but one of survival I hope to impart on generations in the future." She includes these passages to announce her values at the beginning of a writing class, that she is not flippant about the necessity and worth of a hard-won literacy.

As for her current literacy practices, Lauren notes that schoolwork prevents her from the recreational reading she would like to do. Instead, much of her reading time is devoted to texts related to her coursework. However, as she argues, "This isn't a detriment. I am fortunate that the classes I am taking are courses that I enjoy reading about. If given a choice, many times I would choose the books." Lauren sees reading and writing as complementary activities: "One [reading] helps me increase my vocabulary, the latter [writing] helps me use what I have learned." Lauren's interesting notions of reading as absorption and writing as application seem highly pragmatic, despite her earlier descriptions of the pleasures of reading for recreation. She is equally perceptive in her views of literacy as a technology. As she notes,

> Its purpose is to help simplify our lives. Write something down instead of having to remember it. Read a bus schedule instead of trial & error with the wrong ones. The purpose of reading and writing is to assist in making our lives more livable.

Again, Lauren's depiction of literacy's purpose centers on the pragmatic, rather than the artistic or cultural.

In her literacy narrative, Lauren returns to the pleasures of reading, but reading as recreation remains an activity mostly rooted in the past. As she says, "Reading for pleasure is limited because of required coursework." However, in her narrative she zestfully takes us back to her early reading experiences with her family:

> My earliest memories, are not only of reading in general, but are recollections of being riveted on the couch listening to my father read Laura Ingles Wilder's *Little House in the Big Woods*. To an adult the story

> is remarkably tragic, a family facing a cold winter with little food, but to a child the struggles of this farming family are seen only in an adventurous light. The bears that creep outside are just animals from a zoo…. It is from this nightly ritual that I learned to anticipate the adventures that come with reading.

Lauren seems to marvel at capacity of reading to change with the context of the readers' lives, which adds to the richness of reading as an activity for her. Similarly, she is also fascinated with the capacity of language to clarify and obscure. As she says, "From reading you can learn anything….Anything, given enough resources, can be understood through a very simple tool. In contrast, very simple things too can be made complex with the very same language."

Lindsey concludes her literacy narrative as many of her colleagues do by vowing her allegiance to her education, with literacy as the means toward achievement:

> Ultimately, the use of literacy in my life is the sole reason for each and every accomplishment that I have made so far….I have used these skills to help me achieve goals on a daily basis and at no point in the future do I have any intention of losing them or compromising them. I believe that literacy skills will be responsible for future generations to make advancments far superior to anything that could have been imagined fifty years ago.

Lindsey's statement is noteworthy in that she does not distinguish between achievement and literacy as clearly as others do. That is, Lindsey shows an awareness of what Brandt argues—that literacy itself is the main resource for our economy.

In her questionnaire, Lindsey shows an unusual perceptiveness to the perceived tensions of cultural and functional literacies:

> We read thousands of words a day without even realizing it. I hate when people complain "I hate reading" when they are assigned 50 pages in history. No one can hate reading. They just hate when they are forced to read something that doesn't interest them. People take advantage of their literacy skills all the time. I know I do. Reading street signs or food packages doesn't even take a second thought.

In her literacy narrative, Lindsey elaborates even further:

> Just because our generation uses different mediums to learn and expand doesn't mean that we are any less competent than previous generations. There is no need to worry about future generations' IQ's dropping due to decreased popularity in novels and an increased interest in technology.

At this point in the semester, we had discussed some of Birkerts' and Franzen's work, so it is not unexpected that some of these thoughts would creep into the literacy narratives.

Like Lindsey, Gabe enjoys questioning the assumptions of many of the concepts addressed in class. Throughout all of his work during the semester, he wishes to be seen as an intellectual rebel, exposing the untenable archaisms of academia. However, his literacy narrative does not necessarily back up such a persona, because he ultimately embraces the same values of literacy as many academics. Gabe's narrative is perhaps the most skillfully wrought of the class, in that it is structured around all the reading and writing he does in an average day. He reports beginning his morning checking his e-mail and "any one of five" web sites he visits regularly, then reading while waiting for and

riding the bus, and taking notes in class while reviewing the text as discussion progresses. During his lunch break he writes down personal thoughts, and "[s]ometimes I'll go so far as to expand them into essays of sorts, which end on the website dedicated to my random writings." The last half of his school day mirrors the first. His nights, when not working, involve either reading or playing video games. Throughout the course, Gabe vigorously defends the practice of video games, and in this essay he asserts the literate and intellectual value of the games:

> Final Fantasy 4 lends itself well to this discussion. It is a role-playing game and for a player to have any remote idea of what is truly going on they have to be literate enough to read dialogue comparable to that of most novels as well as recognize and mentally compute numbers well into the thousands. The plot is not very difficult to understand, but one must first understand the words "redemption," Armageddon," "vengeance," and "treachery." Many people I've spoken to actually do not know those words so apparently it is not exactly easy stuff.

In addition to defending the value of video games, he establishes himself as not only a rebel against the cultural elite, but an intellectual outsider from those who do not comprehend words like redemption.

Gabe's most striking moments in his literacy narrative, however, deal with his realization that literacy issues are not trivial. In his introduction, he notes that he reads about those struggling with illiteracy from time to time, but the issue is

> akin to all of the other news stories I read every week, I see the headline "Severed head found in elevator shaft" and think little more than "wow,

> that's unfortunate!" and then proceed to the classifieds to continue my search for affordable apartments. Today that changed in a profound way.

To underscore how literacy is a non-issue for him, Gabe then begins recounting his day in literacy. But at the end of his narrative he returns to the story he began in his first paragraph. He describes a woman he sees often at his bus stop, "an overweight, 40ish woman dressed in pajamas and scribbling on the concrete with a rock she'd found." Gabe needs to throw his soda can away and in order to do that he must walk past her to the garbage can. He says it was the "most unnerving, uncomfortable, and deeply enlightening thing" he did that day. He continues,

> As I walked by,…I glanced at what she had recently completed scratching into pavement before she toddled over to a fellow student waiting for the bus and began attempting to stroke his hair. I stopped short, what she had gouged into the cement with that rock was, "I hat Bil so mush why he do things lik tis?" Followed by "wumenshud rul tha wulrd." In that instant the literacy issue became a much closer issue than the proverbial "severed head" would ever be.

As Gabe describes this incident, the encounter with the woman leads him from Plato's cave, so to speak. In this interesting move, Gabe's identity in his narrative shifts from rebel and outsider to unexpected novice into literacy scholarship.

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This study of student literacy narratives offers much to writing teachers. First is that, by passing over teachers as literacy sponsors in favor of parents, students have some awareness that teachers are what Brandt (1998) calls "conflicted brokers" of literacy:

> …we haul a lot of freight for the opportunity to teach writing. Neither rich nor powerful enough to sponsor literacy on our own terms, we serve instead as conflicted brokers between literacy's buyers and sellers. At our most worthy, perhaps, we show the sellers how to beware and try to make sure these exchanges will be a little fairer, maybe, potentially, a little more mutually rewarding. (183)

Thus, writing teachers would be wise to keep such conflicts in mind as we teach. While we would like to be our students' primary literacy sponsors, while we would like to bring our young initiates into the fold of academic and cultural literacy, other, much stronger forces are at work. Second, if we choose to use literacy narratives in our classes, we need to keep in mind that there is a great deal of knowledge and expertise going into their narratives beyond our instruction. We may speak of creating scenes, and urge an intimate honesty, but students are ever aware of the need to craft a narrative to please conflicted brokers. Before despairing over a perceived "inauthenticity" in their work, a consideration of literacy as resource could offer a more productive way to deal with students' rhetorical choices.

A caveat is in order. While this chapter examines how students strategically construct literacy narratives to the desires they project on to their teachers, this is not to suggest that these students are insincere in their narratives. These students are honors composition students, placed or encouraged to take the class because of their proficiency in literate communication. They often do value literacy, but moreover, socially-sanctioned literacy practices have, for the most part, traditionally come easily for them. Their love for, dedication to, and appreciation for literacy are, I believe, heartfelt.

However, their narratives are constructed not only in response to some innate gift or love, but in the context of a culture and economy that vigorously fosters this commitment in myriad ways.

## Notes

1. As Brandt notes, “I have been amazed…at how invisible writing remains as a researched phenomenon in economics, history of education, and communication studies” (13).

2. As Gabe describes the book,

> It was about a boy whose mother had a little poem she would repeat for him every night and the theme of the poem was no matter what she would love him. As the story progresses the boy grows up and his mother gets old and ill, so the tables turn and instead he holds her every night recites his version of the poem to her.

# Chapter 3

## Pledges of Allegiance, Vows of Citizenship: The Delicate Dance of Examining Literacy

In his book *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*, Russel Durst describes creating a writing course "that focuses on the topic of higher education" (178). He developed the course in response to student resistance to what he terms a critical literacy pedagogy. The new course Durst created presented "students with diverse points of view on many central issues that have shaped contemporary thought about higher education" (178.) While such a curriculum may indeed, as Durst planned, provide a means to engage both the pragmatism of college composition students and their intellectual potential, my own course examining literacy and education revealed that Durst's strategy provoked an ambivalent reaction to efforts to "engage[] students in critical scrutiny of schooling and society" (179).

The source of at least some of that ambivalence can be explained by Deborah Brandt's ideas about literacy as resource. If students enroll in college to accumulate the intellectual (and literate) skills that will facilitate their entrance in a knowledge economy, then the very pragmatism that Durst describes might evoke resistance to a critical examination of those skills. In addition, students are operating in a context of multiple,

and sometimes conflicting, sets of socially- and- historically-sanctioned literacy practices. As Brandt explains,

> The history of literacy in the United States has involved constant transformations in the ideological basis of its practices, transformations that gradually co-opt and eclipse earlier versions. However, because changes in the twentieth century have become so much more rapid, the ideological texture of literacy has become more complex as more layers of earlier forms of literacy exist simultaneously within the society and within experiences of individuals. (75)

Thus, as Brandt further shows, these "accumulations of literacy" affect how students approach new learning tasks:

> Contemporary literacy learners…find themselves having to piece together reading and writing experiences from more and more spheres, creating new and hybrid forms of literacy where once there might have been fewer and more circumscribed forms. They must also understand reading and writing in relationship to other communication options, options that themselves continue to change and expand. What we calculate as a rising standard of basic literacy may be more usefully regarded as the effects of a rapid proliferation and diversification of literacy. This relentless process has forced literate ability to include a capacity to amalgamate new reading and writing practices in response to rapid social change. (75)

These "layers" that Brandt describes, these "new forms" existing in rapidly expanding spheres of different literacy practices, are expressed in many of the essays the students

wrote for the Critical Analysis and Writing class. While the students may not be as adept at "amalgamating" different literacy practices, they are certainly well aware of what Brandt calls the "ideological congestion" surrounding such various literacies, and they respond to that ideological congestion in complex and sophisticated ways in their writing.

The second assignment due in my ENGL 1413 class was an analysis of texts by writers deeply concerned with the state of literacy in a postmodern, increasingly technological America. The students wrote the essay after their literacy narrative (discussed in the previous chapter), in which I asked the students to explore how they utilize literacy, how they learned to read and write, and what factors proved influential in that process. I hoped that the literacy narrative would get students started thinking about literacy as not a given in their lives, as something far more complex than reading textbooks and writing five-paragraph essays. I assigned this essay to start students off by looking at popular notions of literacy and the ubiquitous discussions of "Why Johnny Cannot Read or Write" that are so pervasive in the media.

I labeled the second essay a "connections essay" to provoke the students to weigh different arguments, discover positions in common and points of departure. However, it would more accurately be called a response essay which asks students not only to find connections, but also to analyze their own reactions to the authors' arguments. The assignment asked the students to respond to their choice of two of the pieces we'd been discussing: "MahVuhHuhPuh" by Sven Birkerts, "The Reader in Exile" by Jonathan Franzen, "Teaching as Amusing Activity" by Neil Postman, and an excerpt from *Cultural Literacy* by E.D. Hirsch. These writers examine the amount of literary reading undertaken not only by students, but by the American public. They agree that literary

reading has diminished significantly in recent decades, but are far more concerned with why such a lack of interest in reading has taken place.

One of the reasons I embarked on this current research project emerged from reading one of these pieces—"MahVuhHuhPuh," a chapter in Sven Birkerts' book *The Gutenberg Elegies*. The piece is really quite a beautifully-written jeremiad on the eroding status of literary reading in American society, lamenting that so few people know the pleasures of reading in late-twentieth-century America. The experience of reading that piece is disorienting. While concurring with most of the points Birkerts makes, I remained resistant to his message. Perhaps the barely-contained apocalyptic fussiness struck me as a bit premature, or perhaps I was not comfortable with the version of literacy Birkerts forwarded. At any rate, I wanted to undertake my own research, either to refute Birkerts entirely or re-frame the discussion to something more helpful.

An author like Birkerts, though, is difficult to contend with. As Knoblauch and Brannon point out,

> …nothing stands to be gained from inquiring whether American culture…is "really" in the peril that *A Nation at Risk* proclaims: as with belief in goblins and flying saucers, conviction precedes demonstration. One either believes or not; but presuming belief, the signs of peril are everywhere. (100)

All the same, I think it is important for students to know what is being said about them. I think, in the spirit of applied anthropology, students need to be involved in discussions of import to them, and they need to have liberty to answer those who think they know what is going on in young people's heads. Therefore, I asked the students to pick two of the

authors we'd been discussing in class, and write an essay in which they agreed or disagreed with the authors about the state of literacy in the U.S. and why.

The final assignment for the course was a reflective essay that asked the students to look back at the writing, discussion, and research that they had done over the course of the semester and determine how their attitudes or beliefs had changed, if at all. The students reported that their perceptions and beliefs about literacy did not change because of this course; in fact, their beliefs only solidified. This cannot be surprising for a couple of reasons. First, this assignment begs for students to present one last case for getting a good grade. However, I would argue that literacy sponsorship and accumulations of literacy play into what the students say as much or more than grade-grubbing does. In fact, literacy ideologies, as Brandt describes them, precede students' attempts at impressing the teacher with one's dedication to literacy, because expressing a devotion to literacy is required to join the knowledge-based economy that college represents in the first place. Several recurring themes reappear in these reflective essays: renewed objections to the arguments of Hirsch, Birkerts, Franzen, and Postman, the need to prepare for a knowledge economy, and the reappearance of literacy sponsors from previous narratives.

When I read these final reflective essays, my heart (as both teacher and researcher) sank a bit. I perceived these essays as failure on my part, because my class did not spur the students to revelations of culturally-contextualized literacy ideologies that need constant examination. Gone, for the most part, from these essays were any traces of the complex class discussions we had in class, questioning assumptions and constructions of literacy. As I examined the essays closer, with Brandt and Stuckey in

mind, those absences were no longer absences. Those absences were, in many ways, the point. The silences, the gaps, in the reflective essays were the contested ground in which students negotiated the multiple layers of literacy ideologies that we all deal with. Those negotiations, though, took place within a context of preparation for a knowledge economy, in which literacy itself is the coin of the realm. Each ideology represents opportunity, if in multiple and conflicting contexts. Like Stephen North's definition of teaching lore, no layer of literacy can be discarded, for fear of its potential usefulness later. Therefore, each layer, each accumulation of literacy, must be paid its rightful due by the initiates of a literacy-based culture. Due to the dangerous ground that these assignments ask the students to traverse, these writers accomplish an astonishing display of juggling. They must demonstrate their flexibility to adapt to emerging forms of literacy while still professing loyalty to more established and culturally-approved forms as well.

### Literate and Technological Flexibility and the Inevitability of Change

For many students, the assignment asking them to analyze the arguments of Birkerts, Hirsch, Franzen, and Postman provided an opportunity to explore the issues involved with rapid social and technological change. Many students saw these changes as beneficial and exciting, though others viewed these changes with ambivalence, in that they questioned their portent for American society in general and literacy in particular, but conceded their inevitability all the same.

In Gabe, Birkerts and Hirsch find their most pugnacious opponent; even in his title he sets himself up as an antagonist ("Birkerts and Hirsch versus…")[1] to his authors. His is the most passionate refutation of the class. His launching point includes the provocative sentence, "The case is instead that rather than the masses they seek to

implicate in this ignorance, they themselves are the ignorant and remain so by choice." Throughout his essay he maintains a fascinating balance of tone between impassioned reaction and controlled contradiction. While much of his argument could be read as the commonly-heard suggestion that change is inevitable, Gabe comes the closest to articulating an awareness of the historical contingency of notions of "knowledge," "literacy," and "culture." In his essay we see a sense that value judgments about cultural literacy are constantly in flux, which becomes one of his dominant strategies to undermine his authors. He consistently stresses a relativism to cultural literacy. As he notes,

> … I would like to point out something that they are both guilty of in their respective pieces. They both relate the lack of knowledge of the people they are around to their own knowledge. By this I'm referring to the fact that they cannot believe an average person does not know the same things that these two highly educated, intelligent professionals know.

What Gabe sees as the biggest fault of his authors is the idea that what they value should be what everyone should value. This assumption is the cornerstone of his objections. He notes where that assumption biases how Birkerts and Hirsch perceive student resistance.

For example, he analyzes Birkerts' disappointment with his students' lack of enthusiasm for reading "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow":

> It sounds as though he did not consider the fact that perhaps these undergraduates might not appreciate the story that same way he does, if at all. There was no way they could not like it. He is surprised when they do not, but rather then question why this might be, he "writes it off."…It

> could not be that they are part of a different generation than he, a generation like any other that might have a different idea about what is amusing and what is not.

Gabe continues to questions Birkerts' fear that such generational differences in taste qualify as a "sort of disability" (as Birkerts suggests.) He suggests instead that such resistance is an expression of how cultural tastes change. Indeed, he says, "…jazz, rock and roll, counter culture, punk, and rap, all of them were greeted with same sort of alarmist attitudes and all eventually assimilated into more mainstream culture." Thus, the electronic revolution Birkerts fears will follow the same trajectory.

Gabe also explores the subjectivity of experiencing art as another reason that cultural literacy cannot be universal. Just as no one really reads the same book, due to individual variations in reading, no one views the same film in the same way. He illustrates:

> When Beauty and the Beast first appeared in theaters it quickly became a priority for my family that we go and see it. That very weekend we went to an early matinee. Towards the beginning the Beast roars during a close-up shot. He is still a possibly bad guy at this point so it was meant to be a semi-scary moment. I thought he was really loud and extremely cool; my younger sibling, however, began screaming in terror and had to leave the theater….How is that any different from a fantastic book?

Gabe uses this experience as a way to refute the Birkerts' fears that today's youth will develop "cookie-cut responses to the world they encounter" (30). Unlikely, he suggests, because subjective response to art ensures no such conformity.

As mentioned earlier, he criticizes his authors' cultural imperialism as a problematic feature of their arguments. In addition, he is concerned about how such a lack of cultural relativism affects teaching, particularly in literature. Hirsch refers to his own experience, as well as that of his son John, a Latin teacher, as emblematic of how America's cultural literacy is disintegrating. He takes issue with their dismay:

> His son is a teacher and he is a professional writer of sorts, yet they are surprised by the fact that the people they teach and write for are unaware of things on the same level that they are. Why is that so surprising? Of course the people do not know, you have not imparted that wisdom to them yet. What sense does it make to hold them in contempt for ignorance when putting an end to that ignorance is only a few breaths or paragraphs away?

Knowledge has to be given at some point by someone, Gabe implies, so Hirsch should be part of the solution and educate people about what he feels is important.

However, that very valued knowledge constitutes Gabe's chief concern over Hirsch's arguments: "…he assumes that we, as Americans have a shared knowledge that everybody should possess and should be consistent throughout every generation." The problem, for Gabe, is the social and political forces behind who chooses what is worth learning and how:

> Who has the authority to decide what everybody should be forced to learn in school, forced to assimilate to? Apparently Hirsch does, as he can authoritatively inform us that "Benedict Arnold" is part of national

> cultural literacy, "eggs Benedict" isn't" (26). Why not? Simply because Hirsch says so and that should be all the explanation we need.

Gabe's points are certainly not new, but keep in mind that I did not ask the students to read any criticism of Hirsch. The political ramifications emerged in class, and he elaborated extensively on these issues, and took them very seriously. Gabe took equally seriously the elitism that other students noted:

> In both pieces they seem totally ignorant of the fact that outside of their individual nightmarish perception of the world, people are getting along just fine. The people who are reading Fitzgerald and do not know what Zeitgeist means go get a dictionary to find out, the people who can't wait to see "Dancing with The Stars" are getting revved up and I can't wait to play some video games before settling down to read a fantastic history of the Battle of Stalingrad before going to sleep….Books are not being burned in the streets, people still carry on intelligent conversations in coffee shops around the nation. If they know these things they would lose what I think they are really interested in, their position as the intellectuals.

That position is not inherently bad, Gabe insists; however, maintaining that position by identifying a culturally bankrupt Other, simply because the Other has different cultural values, strikes him as intellectually dishonest.

At the end of the semester, Gabe cannot let the opportunity of the final reflective essay go without getting more than a few "proverbial pride jab[s]" at the cultural critics. In fact, he titles his essay "Just to spite Birkerts and Hirsch I have no Title." He attempts to account for his negative reaction to those writers by explaining, "That people can look

at this issue and see it in terms of everybody else's failure deeply offends me and I pray that there are far fewer people in that camp than the others." He notices, albeit unsympathetically, that the main motivation of the cultural critics we read early in the semester is that of dismay and hurt that not as many people seem to like the stuff that they do. He is also deeply concerned with how they present their arguments:

> I've also been made aware of another significant problem in this area, that of the number of people trying to apply outdated value criteria to a new setting. That strategy hasn't worked since long before any of us were born and will continue down that path of failure long after we are all dead and entertainment is beamed directed into our pleasure centers.

Gabe seems to be adopting the maxim that one catches more flies with honey than with vinegar. It is worth noting that he never denies the importance of literacy. In fact, as he mentions from his literacy narrative on, he describes a certain Plato's-cave-esque wonder at literacy once he considered the perspective of those less-educationally-advantaged than he. However, he also expresses dismay that some writers use "complaining" or "whining" as a way to attempt to alter a trend they find alarming. In other words, his oppositional stance has more to do with style and strategy than with substance.

Paige, on the other hand, zeroes in on a crucial term Franzen uses, that of "social dysfunction," which proves the linchpin in her case against Franzen and Postman. She vigorously questions the cause-and-effect relationship between changing literacy practices and the social dysfunction that worries Franzen. Because she was allowed the option to include her own research in her essay, Paige began her argument by finding a workable definition of social dysfunction from the *Journal of Clinical Psychology—*

"problematic social interaction patterns and social skills deficits associated with peer relationships (Bierman and Welsh 1)." Her definition seems serviceable enough, though it may describe individual social dysfunction, as opposed to the culture-wide social dysfunction that Franzen appears to describe. However, such a clear definition (arguably clearer than Franzen's) provides a solid platform for her to analyze the authors' claims.

Paige, refuting the social dysfunction concerns of the authors, employs the common bromide regarding parental and familial dynamics, but hedges her arguments by insisting that the media is one piece of the puzzle, and perhaps a small one:

> Parental fights and an unproductive family environment have the possibility of influencing the youth in such a way that produces a negative view on his or her life. Also, whom the youth chooses to surround him or herself with can have a great amount of influence on his or her behavior. School definitely plays a massive part in the development of the child as well due to the extent of time spent in the environment. Media cannot be claimed as solely responsible for all of the triggers that might cause a youth to become counterproductive to society.

Like many of the students, Paige centers her concern on "youth," a demographic vaguely defined. It is also clear that she does not consider herself part of that population. Any literacy crisis does not focus on her, which is a common theme in many essays. She is careful to point out that she is not one of the unfortunate souls at risk of losing a good relationship with literacy.

She then takes aim at the authors' contention that electronic media's replacement of books in mass literacy may lead to less critical thinking. Like many students, Paige

cannot conceive of a classroom without instruction delivered through diverse means. In addition, Paige sees little connection between Postman's education via entertainment and effective instructional delivery, whatever the media involved:

> To say that media, or television for that matter, offers nothing in the way of critical thinking is to deny what is common place in classrooms—the discourse that takes place after the use of media. Also, though media is used, that does not mean that individuals will depend on everything being sent to them as entertainment for comprehension.

Context seems crucial to Paige's understanding of how media works in education. Media used in a classroom environment is not seen as primarily entertainment because it is consumed in class. The school context affects the reception of the media event. She also seems to concentrate on the media consumed in the classroom, rather than that consumed at home. She does not take into account the learning that takes place outside a brick-and-mortar school. All the same, she notes that youth have an acute awareness of context when consuming media, and are clearly aware when they are to analyze a media presentation that way a school representative wants them to.

Similarly, Paige assures us that a related balance is possible where literacy itself in concerned in the classroom. Addressing in particular Postman's concerns that "[b]ooks…have now become an audio-visual aid" (153), Paige answers that such a view is "a bit extreme." Media may have "taken certain things from texts, but it has not completely obscured" them. Postman's criticism of the program *Voyage of the Mimi* receives her attention (as it did with many of the students) because she sees the program as a savvy use of the television medium to instruct: "Learning purely from a text seems a

bit difficult with the subject of navigation, but to interact with in using computer simulations gives students a learning tool." Paige's essay is unusual in that she spends the bulk of her energy simply refuting the authors' concerns about social disintegration. However, in doing so, she finds ways to situate the place of traditional print literacy within the new schemes of literacy practices. Like other students, she hastens to point out that print literacy is just as important to American life as it always has been.

In her final reflective essay, Paige reports that the course changed her views of literacy in three ways. She indicates that she gained an awareness of the complexities of literacy issues, a greater appreciation for higher (that is, more than functional) literacy, and an even greater sense that literacy is an essential preparation for a changing economy. To begin, she implies that she had not considered how complex literacy really was:

> In the literacy narrative, I took a general stance on my literacy in discussing areas of reading for pleasure, knowledge and for schoolwork. I did not really attempt to break down how I read in terms of my technique or involvement with literature.

She believes that only after longer classroom inquiry did she begin to "break down" how people read and write. She feels that her "view on literacy has changed drastically from a general view to a very proposition-specific view" on literacy issues. By that she means that she feels better equipped to "reflect critically" on the assigned readings, and that she could break down assumptions and "form [her] own opinions about literacy." The result, she says, is that her "beliefs about literacy began to grow from a general 'yes, people should read more' to 'this is what I think about this argument and this is why'."

Paige reports that she also gained a better understanding of different forms or definitions of literacy. Like many students, her definition of literacy was predominantly a functional one:

> At the beginning of the semester, I had the view that literacy was mostly just about being able to read at a certain level and being able to understand what was being read. Now…I understand that literacy involves not only reading for comprehension, but also certain techniques and ways of teaching undertaken by professors. I do not think that I realized that there were different forms of literacy, such as cultural, critical, and digital.

That Paige associates other forms of literacy with college professors indicates an awareness of a "higher" form of literacy that is not necessarily covered prior to enrolling in college. This higher form seems to correspond with her earlier discussion of critical reflection and breaking down arguments and assumptions.

Paige connects her ideas of higher forms of literacy to an essential preparation for successful participation in the global economy. "I believe," she says, "that a mix of cultural literacy, critical literacy, and even inclusion of digital literacy would best prepare me (and others) for a superior future." While she believed earlier that Americans should concern themselves with herding the population toward functional literacy, she feels now that "there is more to being literate than just being able to function in society….I have grown to believe that people need more than basic instruction to get along in society today." Paige demonstrates a more complex awareness of the value of literacy in a knowledge-based economy than many of her classmates, who accept the importance of literacy without asking why. Paige, on the other hand, while asserting the value of

literacy, insists also in a more clearly defined, higher form of literacy that includes more critical thinking.

Vanessa challenges some of the very theoretical conceptions that Birkerts and Postman base their arguments in. While she shows more comfort with the change that leaves some other students a bit uneasy, change is not necessarily the issue at stake in the discussion. For instance, she begins to question the very definitions of literacy that her authors take for granted. She notes that "[a]lthough reading is a unique experience, in reality it is really a form of communication." She refutes any thought that reading is a passive activity that goes on in isolation. She insists that

> [r]eading is an experience unlike any other. Although Birkerts suggest that reading is a solitary experience, when one reads text they are not only given a chance to extend their imagination and knowledge, they are also communicating with the author.

Vanessa seems to start to realize the interactive nature of reading in this passage. Evident in her essay is the beginning of an idea of reading as an act of constructing a text with an author. It is not a great leap from Vanessa's line of thought to the work done by reader-response theorists. The interesting thing about her thinking, though, is her early awareness that literacy is an active process, one that requires knowledge making from more than one party.

Perhaps more interesting, Vanessa begins to explore how sociocultural values are expressed in literacy practices. While

> [w]e have become a society influenced by new electronic advancements like computers, television, and music….it is not because we have different

> values or beliefs. People still draw inspiration from Shakespeare, Aristotle, or Woolf and we definitely have not lost the need to express ourselves. We have just found different ways to convey our ideas…

Vanessa expresses the sense that valued forms of literacy still remain, that they have not been forgotten or discarded. She also confirms that different forms of literacy (as Knoblauch configures them) can be used interchangeably as need demands. Writing to express oneself (Knoblauch's "literacy for personal expression") shares stage time with "draw[ing] inspiration from Shakespeare, Aristotle, and Woolf."

Vanessa takes Neil Postman to task for what she believes is an over-rigid paradigm of effective teaching:

> He feels that using television programs and other visual media diminishes the principle of education by making it into entertainment. Since he personally feels that books are the best way to learn, he comes to the conclusion that "the content of the school curriculum is being determined by the character of television." (153)

She defends the use of an educational program, *The Voyage of the Mimi*, that Postman finds problematic, in that with the program, learning occurs with video first, and print materials are secondary. She employs two strategies to counter Postman's concerns. First, she places a great deal of trust in the creators of the program, the "Department of Education, the Bank Street College of Education, the Public Broadcasting System, and the publishing firm Holt, Rinehart, and Winston." She even goes so far as to describe them as the "same brilliant minds that also write and publish the curriculum for student's textbooks." Clearly, she insists, such "brilliant minds" would never do anything that

would jeopardize student learning. In addition, after all, they have several "brilliant minds" working on this program, as opposed to Postman's one brilliant mind opposing the whole operation.

Second, Vanessa turns to the work of researchers Richard Felder and Linda Silverman, who posit that learners employ thirty-two different learning styles. Therefore, it is crucial to accommodate all learners using visual media in addition to printed materials. In a rare instance of testiness, she challenges Postman's arguments outright:

> Postman thinks that the fact "that children learn their numbers and alphabet from Sesame Street is irrelevant" (144). However, it really is the main point. If they are truly learning then it does not matter what type of media is used to teach them. Educators do not have a lower appreciation for learning, if anything, they are trying to find ways to make learning more understandable and appealing.

In one way, Vanessa's objections to Postman could be seen as an argument for the precedence of learning over the politics of the literacy crisis, but Vanessa insists that the entire assumptions of the literacy crisis need to be reconfigured. Literacy does not shape culture, in Vanessa's view; culture shapes literacy. As she puts it, "…neither author stops to consider whether it is the printed word itself that really gives society its culture, or if it is the only way in which a person can receive a proper education."

By the end of the semester, Vanessa in her final essay obliquely refers to the Birkerts and Hirsch debates, but only to move past them to explore briefly her ideas about literacy as connective force:

> Although I used to think of reading books, newspapers, and magazines by as a solitary experience like Birkerts, I have come to realize that although one maybe reading the material by themselves they are not really alone; they're reading the views of someone else and therefore communicating with the author….Today not only do we get to share our views through newspapers, books, and pamphlets but we can also express them through websites, music, television, power point presentations and countless other ways.

Vanessa's musings show a facility for looking at literacy in interesting theoretical ways; again, her thoughts are not terribly distant from those of reader-response theorists. Her view of readers as active constructors of meaning in relation to author and text shows promise of some sophistication in the future, particularly since we did not cover such issues in class.

Lindsey makes a similar move to Paige in distinguishing between educational shows and entertainment shows. She, like Paige, makes it clear that children are very adept at recognizing an educational program and consume it as such:

> Another argument that could be made is that because these shows were created with educational value in mind, some may not even consider them to be entertainment. Teaching the ABC's on Sesame Street and memorizing the jingles from Schoolhouse Rock stick with us long past our many years of formal education. With that in mind, I ask you to consider the content of these educational shows. They are the "business" shows in a world where "pleasure" rules the television screen.

Lindsey's descriptions of educational television reveal that students have a sophisticated means of recognizing and assimilating the different purposes for various media products. They also seem to suggest a viewer far more nuanced than Postman imagines.

Lindsey, like many other students, downplays her authors' cultural literacy concerns in favor of simply dismantling their arguments. Lindsey chooses the strategy of suggesting that the wealth of knowledge distribution has made us smarter as a nation, rather than dumber. She insists that combining different instructional delivery methods, if not necessary, is the most responsible pedagogical choice:

> …if there are new, more effective ways of teaching and learning, then there should be no excuse for not using them. Since no two students think and learn completely alike I can only conclude that the use of as many methods as possible is most beneficial when providing a quality education. Therefore, the use of entertainment as education is not only okay for classroom use, it is necessary in order to provide an ample education for all students involved.

Almost all the students make it clear that they enjoy and value their electronic media, and in fact see technology so integrated into American lifeways that to imagine anything different is utopian. They then are forced to do a delicate dance of asserting the value of technology while reaffirming the value of print-based, school-taught literacy practices.

Lindsey then considers the objectives of educational media producers. Like many others, Lindsey assumes that the producers are just as savvy as consumers concerning how their products will be received. Looking at Postman's contention that educational

television producers must obey the laws of television before the tenets of education, Lindsey observes,

> …I firmly believe that having more than one goal when creating an educational television show is not only possible, it is also quite common….Another unsupported postulation that Postman makes is that these shows were created to compete with traditional classroom setting teaching style, when in fact they were simply created with the goal in mind to enhance classroom understanding of the material.

Lindsey, like many students, does not see the same distinctions between the format of the classroom and the format of educational television, because the programs are educational. While she does not explicitly describe the formal differences between educational television and television for "pure entertainment," she makes distinctions nonetheless, and those distinctions affect how students relate to the programs.

While Lindsey takes some effort to comfort readers that her authors' concerns are unfounded, she still works harder at undercutting their points, as in her discussion of Jonathan Franzen's "Reader in Exile." In addressing Franzen's lament that "[f]or every reader who dies today, a viewer is born" (165), Lindsey employs a couple of clever strategies in just a few sentences:

> Franzen implies that viewing television directly results in the loss of a reader. The fatal flaw in this argument is simply that the two can co-exist and have for many years. Although the competition in television is fierce and new shows are constantly being conceived, the same can be said for

> books—new novels are constantly in demand and when a reader gets lost in a book, seducing him or her away from it is nearly impossible.

In the first two sentences, Lindsey seems to delight in enumerating the logical fallacies she sees in Franzen's arguments. Her use of the phrase "fatal flaw" indicates a sense that she finds more value and enjoyment in engaging Franzen in a battle of wits than worrying over the veracity of his points. In her third sentence, Lindsey both tries to use Franzen's points against him and reaffirm the role of literacy in American life. If the book is good enough, she argues, then no one really has to fret over the state of literary reading.

Rather than concentrate on inevitability of change in literacy practices, Lindsey chooses to focus on dismantling any idea of a false dichotomy. She turns instead to the benefits of a multitude of communicative practices. She concludes, "Ultimately, Postman and Franzen…fear…a world controlled by television. However, they fail to realize the multiple benefits that can come from an open mind and a belief that in order to get things done, many options must be exhausted first." Lindsey chooses to refute her authors by focusing on choices, options, and variety. She, like many students, finds those options exciting, rather than a diminishment of the wealth that Postman and Franzen perceive.

In her reflective essay, while Lindsey seems to accept the importance of literacy uncritically, she does examine how to impart literacy instruction most effectively. She invokes her literacy narrative to remind us that she will be the first person in her family to receive a bachelor's degree, and she hopes to continue with her master's and doctoral degrees. "For years I have watched my parents struggle," she says, "and I am determined to go down a different path." Education is the key to that different path, but Lindsey is more concerned with how to provide the best literacy education. Her research project

involved examining how to conduct a class that engaged all learners—verbal, visual, kinesthetic, etc. This knowledge of different learning styles, Lindsey concludes, is crucial for both students and teachers:

> In my research I think the most valuable thing I learned in reference to student was simply the importance of knowing oneself and being able to easily adapt to situations that may not be comfortable or traditional. In terms of the instructor, I found that a combination of preparation, knowledge and attentiveness results in a thriving classroom.

Lindsey sees her concern for different learning styles as a departure from the "traditional" style of education embraced by Birkerts and Hirsch, and she "tend[s] to agree with the more liberal, modern writers on this subject." Lindsey sides with authors like Rose, who "understand[s] that a student's learning atmosphere, including peers, instructors' expectations, and curriculum, may be the most crucial aspect of a student's education." As she mentioned in her essay on Birkerts and Hirsch (discussed earlier in this chapter,) learning is crucial, and all else—ideology, theory—are subsumed under the need to make sure students learn, which requires both pedagogical flexibility on the part of the instructor, and awareness and adaptability on the part of the student.

Even Kelsie, the student who most closely personifies the ideals espoused by Birkerts, Franzen, and Hirsch, cannot bring herself to accept their vision of literateness. In some ways, she in fact agrees with them, but on more superficial levels. She identifies strongly with Hirsch's contention that common cultural touchstones provide a nation with a linguistic shorthand for communication. She does not, however, explore how such

cultural touchstones are negotiated, or who wins or loses in such negotiations. Interestingly, though, she does employ issues of diversity in her rebuttal to Hirsch:

> …shared knowledge is becoming more difficult to obtain because America is so diverse. This diversity is something that Hirsch seems to fear. I think it's something to embrace because it urges people to accept new ways of thinking and behaving. No one, especially Hirsch, has to agree with the changes brought into American culture because of this diversity, but the changes are going to happen anyway.

Kelsie's straddling of the fence in this passage is fascinating. While it is ostensibly a good thing that America is becoming so diverse, the inevitability of increasing diversity is not, for Kelsie, without an element of controversy.

This idea of inevitability is a cornerstone of her observations. Hers is an argument of succeeding generations: what older generations valued is subsumed by the changing needs of later generations. As Kelsie asserts, "I believe that much of the knowledge that Hirsch keeps expecting people to share is actually confined to a specific generation." One of the most troubling concepts for Kelsie is Hirsch's idea of common knowledge, such as his list of things every "literate American" needs to know:

> There is never going to be a written standard of necessary literate knowledge that will stand the test of time because time is changing. I do recognize that it is very likely that the literacy of our nation is in decline. However, there are different societal standards of education now than there were thirty years ago. My point is that today's youngsters may not share every piece of common knowledge that those of generations past

> have shared, but they do have a common culture and knowledge to the extent that the society allows. There is no one source to blame about the supposed decline in literacy, but literacy is bound to change with the culture of the people as it always has.

Kelsie makes a crucial point in her argument about the historical contingency of knowledge, and the protean nature of socially-valued knowledge. However, one of the things worth noting in the passage, though, is that she still felt compelled to concede that it might be "very likely that the literacy of our nation is in decline." Kelsie, at this point, like many of the students, has not entirely interrogated different definitions of literacy (functional, critical, cultural, and so forth.) At the same time, after reading the list of Hirsch's essential cultural knowledge, it would hard for anyone to imagine that our cultural literacy is in anything but decline. All the same, Kelsie's main point of contention with Hirsch remains that of the inevitability of change, and the consequent alteration of the historical context for literacy.

In the face of this change, Kelsie in her final reflective essay feels that young people should be encouraged to read, but that encouragement cannot be out of context with the rest of their lives. As she puts it,

> Just telling a kid to read something that's interesting to them is not enough to help them in the future. Children need to be taught to read into the importance of what they're reading and they need to be able to ask and answer questions. They will get more from their reading if they understand what the purpose of it is and how they can use it for future reading tasks.

Kelsie seems to be advocating for a form of literacy that Myers calls "new literacy," the practice of writing and reading that demands critical-thinking questions. In addition, Kelsie notes that literacy cannot be encouraged by conveying a blanket notion that reading is a *de facto* good and noble act. Reading is good, Kelsie implies, if it leads to other things.

To get to those "other things," Kelsie proposes that all students be required to "at least" finish high school. While she recognizes that leaving school may be tempting for some students, she also suggests that most high school students are not mature enough to make that decision:

> Since they are still children, they can't possibly be able to conceive of how important an education is going to be in their adult lives. Even basic level jobs encourage having a high school diploma or for drop-outs a GED. If parents are going to allow or force their kids to drop out of high school, they should be required to pass the GED test for the sake of the kid's future. At least on paper they will have an understanding of basic literacy.

What is most noteworthy about her comments is her emphasis on the importance of credentialing. While education, reading, and critical thinking are important, Kelsie feels that everyone, particularly those who do not value education as much as she, should have an understanding of basic literacy "at least on paper." For Kelsie, as for many others, the value of literacy inevitably boils down to its potential worth as a resource for our contemporary economy. "America's growing global economy," Kelsie argues, "with constantly changing technology requires more than basic literacy skills." While those with a high-school diploma or GED may not meet the literacy demands of our economy

as much as others, Kelsie suggests they will not be as disadvantaged as those without the minimum literacy credentials.

Like Kelsie, Caitlin insists that change is inevitable, and she is not entirely comfortable with that thought. However, she is willing to consider the possibility that the change may yet be for the good:

> Society is growing and changing whether for the better or worse is personal opinion. I believe people have become far more vulnerable to the images and effortless access of our electronic world, but nonetheless, nothing stays the same. Who is to say our culture is not maturing and budding into a revolutionary position on the path of our existence in the world as a whole? The path our new multimedia culture is taking can be seized and worked with, or can be utilized while still holding fast to our old ways which worked just fine.

Evidence of nineteenth-century conceptions of literacy appears in Caitlin's concern over the "images" and "effortless access" of electronic media. Anything obtained effortlessly seems to have suspect value in this passage, and it is not difficult to extrapolate that knowledge garnered from the effort of actually reading must be intrinsically better. The theme of adaptation here becomes more an issue of conscious choice, that is, deliberately fashioning a blend between the new and the old.

### Adherence to Tradition

While many students embraced the possibilities of technology and social change, most also went out of their way to reaffirm their commitment to more established and socially-validated forms of literacy. Most of the students disagreed to some extent with

the authors' arguments, but the students with more conservative views of literacy expressed concern over the nature and pace of change. However, even the students who were more likely to embrace social and technological change hastened to demonstrate their devotion to more traditional forms of literacy.

Caitlin in many ways agreed with the main tenor of the authors' arguments, but she stresses that Franzen and Postman miss the point entirely in terms of literacy education. While she admits that to "function in the world today it is vital to be electronically competent," she questions whether such a state is truly beneficial. Taking a cue from Postman's assertion that television teaches children only to appreciate television, she paints a disturbing picture of the interaction between children and television:

> Have you ever looked at a child who was watching cartoons? Their attention is unaffected by their surrounding environments. Nothing is stopping them from changing the channel, turning the screen off, or even from learning information that may or may not be proper or even correct. They sit completely captivated by the elusive images flashing before their eyes.

The result, Caitlin argues, are children who "could not carry on a conversation with an adult due to the lack of personal communications and verbal connections." Literacy is not the only casualty of the electronic age.

While Caitlin echoes Franzen's appreciation of reading as a valuable cognitive skill, she too waxes philosophical about the value of rapid change. She admits that educational programs share similarities with children's books, but she denies that the two

are interchangeable. Educational television provides a "vivid fantasy world," and stress keeping the attention of the viewer over teaching "life's values and morals." Books, on the other hand, "tend to teach lessons in parables using stories as examples." Her emphasis on the moral component of literacy education again exhibits strains of nineteenth-century conceptions of the value of literacy that Brandt and Myers illustrate.

However, Caitlin insists that ultimately any debate over whether print or electronic media should achieve primacy is irrelevant, at least in terms of education. The issue, she asserts, is that "[p]arents simply do not have the influence and interaction essential to guide their children in responsible viewing and learning." Children, she insists are biologically adept at learning, a resource that seems to go untapped:

> …children have a genuine, natural interest and even curiosity when it comes to learning new things….This new revenue of learning is dancing in step with the rest of the technological advances in our world. These kids are being geared and even programmed to deal with and eventually use new ways of learning and living.

Caitlin ratchets up this rather passionate manifesto with her central point, which is that "[k]ids love to learn; and they love learning with their parents more. A child will have far greater learning experiences and memories when they are taught by their loved ones who provide and nurture them in the first place." Caitlin's strategy is not simply to ask "Where are the parents?," but to advocate subtly for home-schooling, which she would endorse much more strongly in her research project.

Kelsie, as well, expresses her dismay at what she perceives as others' lack of commitment to print literacy:

> For most of my life, I have considered reading novels to be an escape from everyday life and a way to just sit down and relax. Sometimes it makes me sad to think that there are a lot of people that either can't read at all, or that don't like to read to the extent that I do.

Kelsie established a similar persona in her literacy narrative; she categorized herself not only as a reader, but as one who truly valued reading, and referred to unnamed others who did not.

At the same time, her conception of change is not entirely stable. At one point in her essay, she suggests that "history is doomed to change." She disagrees with Birkerts' charge that those who insist that change is the only constant in history are missing the point—that change is currently happening too fast for humans to adapt:

> …the people of the American culture have been forced to learn to adapt to the change as it comes. My generation has had no difficulty trading in their bulky CD Walkmans with cases of CDs in tote for the iPod that can hold 3,000 MP3 format songs in the palm of their hand.

Kelsie seems to accept that change is inevitable, but is not completely comfortable with that fact. The difference between Kelsie and the authors is that Kelsie sees very little value in fighting change.

In her final essay, she writes that the course did not substantially change for feelings about literacy. As she mentions in both her literacy narrative and her Connections Essay, she "become[s] frustrated with people who don't want to learn." However, her views of those people have become a bit more complex:

> I have come to understand that the reason they don't want to learn is because they feel that they are stupid people and they aren't capable of higher learning. This is not true and I know that this is where my frustration stems.

If anything, Kelsie has realized that there are complicated reasons for differences in literate ability, and that those who fall behind are not just obstinately committed to ignominy. She has developed, though, a better idea of how to help those people, how to, in her words, "fix the problem." Parents are the first line in her defense, because "[p]arents are absolutely essential to the learning process. They can give a student an education and they can take it away." For Kelsie, parents continue to be the predominant literacy sponsors.

Another interesting take on literacy sponsorship that Kelsie clues into is the idea that social pressures affect one's literacy practices. As she notes, "Society determines what is cool these decisions can impact the culture of an entire generation." In retrospect, Kelsie might have benefited from some nudging in the direction of works like Richard Hofstadter's *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, because she insists that "reading is not cool" and thus the literacy of young people is in a tenuous position. Kelsie uses this opportunity to return to the idea of E.D. Hirsch, with whom she feels she shares some ideological kinship, in that she concedes the need for a culture to have "common ground" but she is

> …sure that not everyone is capable of fully understanding every aspect of our ever-changing culture. What Hirsch believes to be relevant to every American is his opinion; however, the American people need more than

> just one person to determine what is relevant to their children and themselves.

Kelsie's insistence that "not everyone" can fully understand our changing culture flies in the face of her earlier assertion that those who have a hard time learning can be "fixed." There is still some cultural ambivalence in her work toward those she feels are not living up to what she assumes to be their literacy potential. She smoothes it over a bit, though, by suggesting that any cultural standards cannot be handed down from one person on high, as she perceives Hirsch's argument.

Arianna chooses a common strategy by considering the hyperbole of Franzen and Postman's arguments. She carefully notes the areas where she agrees with the authors, but consistently chides them on their overstatement of the problem. However, she often lets her voice be drowned out by the authors'. In many of her paragraphs, she uses the majority of the paragraph to discuss (often summarize) Franzen and Postman's arguments, but reserves very little of the paragraph for her own response.

For Arianna, new technologies such as television are a convenient and quick tool for education, but do not control education, as Postman in particular worries. She, like many others, rejects Postman's assertions that television ultimately educates children only to watch television, and definitely not to the extent that print literacy is becoming extinct. While "[i]t is a lot faster to watch the movie *Pride and Prejudice* than read the novel", Arianna suggests, "…the novel will not be completely replaced with television because there will always be someone who wants to put the extra effort into reading a book and these people keep the novel alive."

Arianna, like many of her classmates, hints at one of Birkerts' main claims, that there is a pleasure to reading that perhaps may be lost. Birkerts, in lovely prose, describes the experience of reading for him: "I feel a tug. The chain has settled over the sprockets; there is the feel of meshing, then the forward glide." Birkerts suggests that this pleasure is losing out to the consumption of other communication technologies, but Arianna implies that such a pleasure is not lost, though admittedly the number of connoisseurs of such pleasures may be dwindling.

Arianna invokes the novel Fahrenheit 451 in her examination of the extremes of Franzen and Postman. Will we become, she asks, the society Vonnegut describes, with forbidden books and public obsessed with electronic media? "I do not think it will," she concludes, because

> [s]ome of our society is depended on books, either for education or entertainment, so books can never be outlawed. Books are not on the brink of extinction, people just need to be pushed into reading them. Books were once seen as a form of entertainment, but now children see them as work. Fortunately, books like the Harry Potter series are making reading fun and interesting again, so hopefully children and adults will be interested in reading.

There are a number of interesting issues this passage brings up. That Arianna thinks people need to be "pushed" into reading evokes notions of literacy as "good for you" like high fiber and exercise. However, she then laments that children see books as work, and that reading needs to be made fun again. Note also that youth literacy keeps cropping up again and again in these arguments about literacy and education. Like many in and out of

academia, literacy education is seen as an issue revolving around children. Arianna diplomatically includes adults in her discussion, but children figure very prominently in her essay. Literacy is not seen as an educable subject, particularly in college. Such a view should concern college literacy educators, particularly those who aim to teach their students the new form of literacy Myers describes.

Economics figures into Arianna's contention that books will survive our shift to a culture dependent on electronic communication. "There are certain jobs, like a physician or a lawyer," she insists, "that needs certain schooling to succeed in that field and there is no way television shows can do that." She seems to see the professional fields as so traditional that only a traditional education will do. However, new technologies are invading even Arianna's professional training. Newly-developed robotic patients are being used in medical schools to give medical students practice with diverse procedures that would be dangerous or uncomfortable for live human beings. What's interesting about Arianna's observation, though, is the implicit notion that the more prestigious or important the field, the more important it is that the training be based in books. For those saving lives or raking in enormous salaries, only a *Paper Chase*-style education will do.

Arianna also recognizes, as Franzen does, that buying power figures into who enjoys and benefits from electronic media. "Television will never take over the importance of education," she says, "because some societies will never have enough money to afford computers or televisions for their students." Here Arianna is, perhaps unknowingly, in good company. Franzen joins with Deborah Brandt and Cynthia Selfe in voicing concerns about the class-based economic inequality of electronic technologies and the success they are reported to augur.

In her last paragraph, though, Arianna reaffirms that books will last: "books are the only way to look into our past and if we lose books we lose our history." Her statement of faith seems a bit of a backhanded compliment. Books may be a thing of the past, but because they act as a cultural reservoir, we should keep them around. For Arianna, as for Kelsie and Caitlin, change is a bittersweet if unstoppable phenomenon.

Arianna, in her final reflective essay, remains willing to accept the views of reading as inherently good. While she disagrees with labeling people "uncultured" as Birkerts and Hirsch do, she still feels that attaining a level of socially-valorized "culture" is still important. While at the beginning of the semester Arianna enjoyed reading because it was "relaxing," Arianna now values reading because "a lot of people do not know how to read or take reading for granted." Another belief even more solidified from the semester is the extent to which she will push her own children to read. Doing so, she suggests, is crucial for their future:

> It is very important for children to read because it builds vocabulary and imagination. These two qualities are very important to be successful in a school and in a career. I am going to try my best to teach my children that reading is very important because it will help them their whole lives….Since children are our future it is very important to keep them interested in reading so reading will stay alive.

As with many of her colleagues, Arianna's image of the future is a bit amorphous. The literacy skills needed for success are fairly vaguely delineated. Arianna here concentrates on vocabulary and imagination as keys to success. Because future literacy sponsorship is so hypothetical for first-year college students, the value of literacy is often perceived as

self-evident, and the specific skills that augur success are presumed to accompany the credentialing process that education entails. Similarly, reading seems to impart, if not an entrance into a privileged elite, then at least it prevents a fall from grace. She insists, "I want to read more now because I do not want to be a part of the population that does not read or be a part of the population that people like Birkerts and Hirsch have labeled uncultured." Although she mentions earlier in the essay that she does not feel it fair to label people uncultured, she certainly does not want to endure that label herself. The same questioning attitude toward labeling other people does not apply to her. Reading is good for her and hers, and really is probably good for everyone, but she's not willing to venture a value judgment. At any rate, for Arianna, that value judgment is still quite implicit: reading is good for you, and that is why she is an advocate.

Lindsey, as well, cannot conclude her connections essay without stressing the importance of literacy in no uncertain terms: "Ultimately, no matter the stance that an author may take on literacy, and no matter the experiences I had as a student, that fact is that literacy is the foundation for all education and without it our world would cease to exist." While the apocalyptic connotations of the last phrase give pause, the reader should not dismiss the import of the sentiment. Literacy, as Brandt reminds us, is the raw material and the final product of a knowledge economy, and Lindsey (as with her colleagues) knows it all to well.

Like Arianna, Vanessa reports in her reflective essay that she feels the biggest change she has experienced during the course has been a strengthening of her appreciation for reading:

> I have always loved reading, but I never realized its complexity or that people have so many different attitudes and beliefs about it….Not only do I still love to read and write, but now after studying and analyzing other people's perceptions, experiences, and beliefs, I am able to appreciate it even more.

Vanessa is unusual in that her final self-reflective essay makes little mention of the economic benefits of literacy. She mentions social or economic advancement only in the context of writing about the assigned readings by Mike Rose and Frederick Douglass. She indicates, "I never realized what a truly liberating force reading can be for people. By reading accounts from Frederick Douglass and Mike Rose, it is clear to see how reading can empower one's mind and spirit." She later describes how literacy helped Rose become the first person in his family to go to college. Note, though, that Vanessa always emphasizes the personal and spiritual advantages of literacy over the economic. That Rose went to college means, for Vanessa, that he could develop his mind, while the economic advantages are a beneficial side effect. Such careful choices stressing the "literacy is good for you" angle contain echoes of previous literacy traditions, as Brandt, and particularly Myers, have pointed out.

Gabe, for all his resistance to Birkerts and Hirsch, hastens in a couple of places in his connections essay to identify issues with which he agrees with the authors, such as his insistence that "people need to learn and know how to communicate effectively, …that data and ideas be passed along." He denies, though, that a shared cultural knowledge is essential to that process. Gabe supports some of Birkerts' ideas more enthusiastically: "One is that it is important to be able to understand emotions and thoughts another human

being may be having….Also it is valid to say reading can be a wonderful escape from everyday monotony." However, while Gabe might support the *esprit* behind Birkerts' assertions, the expression of it rankles Gabe:

> To say reading is the most effective or even the only way to come by this escape or empathy is simply not true. Romantic plays and movies are regularly set in distant times and places, yet…[p]eople still turn out in droves to see them. Certainly this is not because people cannot relate to this couple who through much adversity finds love and happiness, on the contrary people do relate to it. That's why they enjoy it so much, they imagine doing to same thing, or look back on similar events they've experienced.

While Gabe's qualifications that he, too, values literacy are less pronounced, less forceful, they are still there. See, for example, his comment in an earlier quotation about finishing off his night of video-game-playing with a book on Russian history. Not even stubborn Gabe, who at times in class seemed to enjoy picking apart Birkerts and Hirsch almost to the point of *ad hominem* attack, would deny the importance of literacy. To do so would violate too many rules about how and why one pursues a post-secondary education.

Gabe, in his final essay, indicates that he found the course interesting because he is "fascinated with all human thought and perception," and noted that before the class he did not know of the debates and controversies over literacy:

> In my literacy narrative I said that I never really thought about literacy, I was content to merely go about my apparently literate lifestyle and not worry about much of anything outside of my daily routine.

As a result of the work done in class, specifically the literacy narrative, Gabe says he kept track of the writing and reading he's done, which "serves to make my knowledge more concrete. Knowing full well that some people can't do half of what I do on a regular basis really has made me appreciate all of the abilities I've developed."

### Reframing the Conversation: Lauren and Kara

Lauren and Kara are interesting writers, in that they found ways to rethink the debates in very different ways. They managed to bring their own disciplines (political science and elementary education, respectively) into the conversation, and in doing so, opened up new avenues of thinking about the literacy issues the course brought up.

Lauren, a Political Science major concentrating on international studies, brings a different and fascinating perspective to the issues that Postman offers in his work. With my permission, she analyzed Postman's work through the lens of Frederick Douglass's literacy narrative, to unfavorable results. She looks at the educational opportunities offered to Americans and sees abundance, whereas she regards Postman as seeing lack. This concerns her, particularly in light of the importance Douglass attributes to education and literacy. "With a grateful attitude Douglass embraced education," she indicates, "and embraced and pressed though each new door his studies opened for him." In addition, "From education he learned that the life into which he was born was not a permanent position, but only a position to be molded." In contrast, Postman "complains that the current methods (of education) are substandard." Lauren's concern over Postman's

criticism centers on what she perceives as his lack of faith in the power of education. Because she brings the perspective of international studies to the table, and because she knows that the education available in the United States far exceeds that available in many other countries, she sees Postman's complaints as tantamount to ingratitude.

"Are we such an advanced society," Lauren asks, "that we have the right to criticize where our education and learning come from?" At this point she blends her international perspective with commonly-touted mythologies of American class fluidity:

> Today, education can take a poor child in the urban city and transform them into a world class physicist. As Americans we are not predisposed to a future. Every person has certain obstacles to overcome, but with a motivation to change, success is possible.

Lauren's essay confirms beliefs in not only the fluidity of the American class system, that a citizen can transcend class boundaries if only they try hard enough, but the idea that education and literacy are important means, perhaps the most important means, for transcendence. Douglass, who figures in Lauren's essay as a historical example of the lack of educational opportunity that those in other countries face,

> …saw reading as a simple means for advance, and that an education derived from literacy is a tool to create a life fuller, richer, and more successful than before. Douglass viewed literacy as a key to transforming his life from one of slavery to one of freedom.

In the face of the historical (and contemporary) reality that large populations are denied educational opportunities, Lauren implies, criticism of such an educationally rich culture as the United States is to fly in the face of our culturally-approved values of the

importance of education. These are dangerous values to question, particularly for a student graduating from a university, and moving into the world of work that a college education is supposed to prepare one for.

Lauren hedges a bit, though, when she takes into account that such educational resources may be taken for granted in our culture:

> It is true that today, children aren't eager to attend school and learn about biology and math. It is also true that no longer will reading cause a person to stand out amidst a crowd. Today, education and success are synonymous with money, and although any person can find a way to achieve an education, the "full potential" of a person has become a much more complex entity.

All complexity aside, though, Lauren remains unfazed in the power of education and literacy. She maintains that "…education, as in Douglass' time, still opens doors to further expansion and creates avenues for advancement in society." Therefore, she insists, "[i]f education continues to remain the fundamental tool of advancement that Douglass embraces, Postman has little to fear." Lauren's perspective of Postman is unusual in that the other students did question the authors' values of education and literacy, and reflects how embedded cultural values of education, literacy, and the possibility of class transcendence are among college students. The thought that a criticism of American education could be seen as a rejection of the opportunities this country offers illuminates how pervasive and entrenched the image of the university as gateway to social advancement is.

Lauren, like Lindsey, invokes her parent's literacy sponsorship in her final reflective essay, and muses in grandiose terms about the role of literacy in American lives:

> As I said in my literacy narrative, at the beginning of the year, my parents taught me that literacy, and subsequently reading and education, is the most important aspect of life. I still believe that and regardless of the arguments that we have looked at over the past semester, I believe that throughout all the arguments that researchers and educators pose, adult involvement and devotion is a vital part of any education, regardless of technology.

Lauren's comments underscore, it seems to me, the assertions of Elspeth Stuckey, in that so many debates over literacy add up to nothing if no one questions the roles literacy plays in American society, especially in issues of class. We did not have a chance to read anything by Stuckey in class, due to time constraints, and while Lauren, like many students, accepts the supremacy of literacy unquestioningly, she still observes that many literacy and education debates are *sturm und drang* that do not address the underlying societal emphasis on literacy and the crucial role parents play in its sponsorship.

Because of the importance Lauren places on literacy, she concludes, as many of her colleagues did, by stressing how she places even more significance on literacy:

> …I have come to the conclusion that my views have not changed, but have broadened. I now know more about the subject of literacy and the impact that the debate has over society. And I think that this is almost more

> important than changing my point of view or viewing my literacy practices differently…

Though couched in reasonable language, Lauren appears hesitant to challenge too deeply her views about literacy. Knowing more about the debates holds "almost more" importance that actual change or viewing her literacy practices differently. There is some wisdom in this course of action, in that Lauren has the self-confidence not to let her perspective be changed in one semester of one class, and yet her hesitancy speaks just as much to a caution about delving into the issues that Stuckey tries to face.

Kara takes the idea of rerouting her author's argument in a completely different and complex direction. While she agrees to a large extent with Franzen and Postman's ideas, she still maintains that their concerns are not centered on the correct issues. She insists,

> Americans are literate. They have enough knowledge to read, it is critical thinking that lacks in today's society. Critical thinking is the ability to not stop with the text but to apply the text to society. It is the ability to analyze, explain, interpret, and infer from and beyond the text. It is relating what is read to society or everyday life.

With a fairly workable definition of critical thinking established early in her essay, Kara then subsumes the state of literacy in America to the state of critical thinking: "The effects of technology in everyday life, in the public school classroom, and the written word versus the visual image cause critical thinking to stop therefore causing literacy to decline."

However, Kara never strays from her main concern over how Americans develop their critical thinking skills. In her model, these skills give meaning to a literate practice, not the ability to decode and encode text:

> Critical thinking allows the reader to use all five senses in a completely different way than the person who read the text five weeks ago. Every person reading brings their own ideas and thought processes into a passage, and then takes those and arrives at a meaning. The passion and the critical thinking that the written word evokes will allow it to live past the technological advances.

Moreover, Kara insists,

> Americans can and will continue to read whether it is on their computer or out of a book. Literacy is not the question. The question is whether people possess the ability to connect the words on the page to society though analysis, explanation, and interpretation.

The problem that cultural critics like Franzen and Postman need to concern themselves with, Kara would advise, is that "Americans only do enough to get by." Our future success as a nation, she argues, is not maintaining a standard of literacy, but seeing that "the general public needs to begin to value thinking above mediocrity." Her perspective is fascinating and valuable because of how she situates literacy in critical thinking in a chicken-or-the-egg configuration. While Postman or Franzen might think of literacy as a prerequisite for critical thinking, Kara posits the opposite. Critical thinking, she asserts, gives meaning and context to a literate practice.

Kara takes television to task for what she sees as its role in hindering development of critical thinking skills. "Television," Kara believes, "…is out of control." The result is that children are guided in their thinking, and therefore do not learn to think through problems themselves. The problem she sees with television is that

> [w]atching television is a one-sided activity. There are no teachers to answer to and no standard which to adhere. Television is not like school which "is centered on the development of language" it only "demands attention to images" (Postman 143). It is that attention that takes way from critical thinking.

Interestingly, Kara focuses on time children spend watching television *away* from school, whereas other students looked at television viewing *in* school. While many other students see the value of using televisual media as part of a structured lesson plan, Kara expresses concern for those times teachers are not around to help analyze a program.

In addition Kara is also skeptical of how best to employ technology in the classroom. She is an elementary education major, and much of her analysis stems from puzzling over how to implement televisual media into the classroom. She closely examines the program *The Voyage of the Mimi* that Postman analyzes, and comes to a similar conclusion, though for very different reasons. Postman notes that the program, if used as recommended by the producers, would take a full semester to cover all the units (148). Kara sees some educational value in the program, suggesting that "a good teacher" (a pointed distinction for her) could use the program to "explore ecosystems, food chains, life cycles, spelling words, oceanic zones, adding and subtracting fish, tracking migration

patterns, integrating children's literature, history of whales, and comparing and contrasting whales to other species." However, Kara points out,

> …[l]et's face it, teachers are so overwhelmed that it would take a teacher who actually cared to go above and beyond teaching to the standardized test which results determine their job. The *Voyage of the Mimi* project holds some merit in that it attempts to integrate new ideas and technology into the classroom; however, it fails because if every class in America is doing the exact same thing then individualism which aids critical thinking is completely depleted.

Kara does not seem to dismiss instructional technology out of hand, but she considers the working contexts of teaching when she questions the use of television in the classroom. In addition, any instructional method must pass the "critical thinking test" to fit into her model of correct instruction. Hers are some pretty stringent standards, developed out of training in teaching that many other students are not privy to.

Kara places a great deal of faith in the survival of hard-copy print literacy, but not because of a blind faith in the assumed value of literacy. Her view is largely pragmatic. "It seems clear," Kara suggests, "that though technology has altered the way most people gain their knowledge the book will not be replaced. You cannot take your computer everywhere and receive wireless networks to read a book off of the internet. A book can go anywhere." There are limits to more advanced technology, she implies, that guarantee a place for less-advanced technologies.

Like Lindsey and Lauren, Kara uses her conclusion to make a similarly sweeping assertion about the importance of literacy:

> Literacy is something of great value….If every person today could understand that the ability to read the written word is still that powerful and important then we would not have children falling through the cracks. Reading opens worlds and inspires all ages. It brings about change and alters the status quo. Reading is irreplaceable.

While Kara presents her literacy beliefs as slightly more conservative, she does not seem reactionary. For instance, she remains highly skeptical of using technology in the classroom, but she still insists that it may have a place, if used carefully. While she insists that while "[i]f used correctly technology can provide many different things to a class," she also fears the possibility that "[e]veryone will think like a computer which is void of emotion and expression." In a strikingly complicated postmodern thought, she decides that "[t]echnology should be a link in the chain but the day it becomes the chain is the day that real thinking ends."

In addition, Kara shows in her final reflective essay the same complex notions of what literacy is that she demonstrated in her other work and in classroom interaction. As she notes early in her essay,

> [t]he widely accepted definition of literacy is the ability to read and write that definition has been expanded in the present day and age to include all topics. The ability to use a computer prompts the term computer literate. If a person is capable of reading a map and recalling places then they would be considered spatially literate.

While her tone indicates that Kara is not entirely convinced of the appropriateness of invoking the term "literacy" with every form of knowledge, she agrees that literacy

cannot be confined to simplistic, functional connotations of reading and writing. Moreover, she insists that reading instruction cannot be taught isolated from a student's specific context, but "should be present in the entire day. If you read a word problem, you are reading. If you proofread another student's work, you are reading." Kara's theoretical stance, therefore, is quite complex in that she straddles Brian Street's autonomous and ideological models of literacy in interesting ways. While she acknowledges the complicated issues involved with pinning down what literacy is and believes instruction should take place in context (rather than as an autonomous skill), she still maintains that reading assists in critical thinking, as would researchers who have adopted the "Great Divide" theory. Kara's conceptual moorings, by attaching themselves to both camps, make for a wonderfully, yet frustratingly complex analysis of her thinking processes.

### Negotiating Conflicting Needs: Brigid

Brigid's writing is, in many ways, illustrative of how students found ways to shuttle between the two seemingly opposing camps of literate progressivism and conservatism. Her writing, as well, also shows how utterly necessary it is to search for synthesis of these two camps.

In her connections essay, Brigid divides her time between simply refuting Franzen and Postman's concerns and looking at the economic reality that literacy represents. She first challenges Postman's concerns that entertainment lowers the educational value of a program. Brigid asks,

> If that is true, then why is it an effective teaching strategy to show people as well as have them read it? Not all people learn well by reading. For thousands of years people were educated orally, and a great deal of people

> still utilize this strategy as effective. In essence, he is saying that nothing is an effective teaching skill unless it is read.

Brigid is one of the few students who considered a cultural paradigm that might not include written literacy. For most of the students, the dominance of print literacy is simply assumed, and that dominance is also assumed to be right and natural.

Moreover, Brigid examines the teaching of literature itself in light of Postman's concerns about the educational value of entertainment:

> Postman believes that "television teaching usually takes the form of story-telling," and according to him, that is less-effective than more traditional forms of teaching (148). Literature is story-telling. If this narrative teaching isn't effective, then the study of literature isn't effective in educating, according to this theory.

Making a point reminiscent of the Renaissance advice to "delight and instruct," Brigid works to reclaim the very values that Postman espouses. Like so many of her classmates, part of the appeal or value of the assignment is to find ways to refute the arguments made by the authors.

One of the strategies Brigid employs to refute Postman is to list off the media offerings, such as The History Channel and Winnie-the-Pooh cartoons, that she feels disprove his assertions. "If a television show is just fun," Brigid asks,

> why is there an entire network called The Learning Channel? People can learn to read, count, do math, build a deck, and make a bomb on television. They can also learn the history of entire countries, about prominent historical figures, and about current events. This is not just idle

> fun, but important knowledge. Yes, all these things can be found in books or newspapers, but for some, television is more accessible. If it is educating people, at all, shouldn't it be embraced?

Like her colleagues, Brigid sees education as something too important to be quibbled over, that is, she does not see much room for ideological debates when there is the important business of education at hand. There seems to be a mandate for education at any price, by any way effective. For Brigid and her fellow students, that knowledge is transmitted is far more important than the method of transmission.

Brigid's brief critique of Franzen leads her into her most pointed observations about the nature and use of literacy in the United States. She succumbs to the impulse to note that American are spending billions of dollars are year on books, so the novel cannot truly be dying, as Franzen fears. What is of more concern for Brigid is that "[r]eading has been secure in its aristocratic atmosphere for generations, much to its detriment. Franzen says himself that 'the electronic apotheosis of mass culture has merely reconfirmed the elitism of literary reading," (178) which is exactly the problem." Brigid marvels that literature as intellectual achievement could be a "bad thing, but it can be." She insists that the literary reading's perceived elitism is the real problem facing our reading culture:

> For education and literacy in America is truly a caste system. As much as some might deny it, it is. Monetary status has a huge effect on the level of education sought. Education is offered in even the most impoverished of neighborhoods. Schools and libraries are in every district of the country. It is not the lack of opportunity that is keeping our poor families from being well-educated. It is the image of literacy that is. Why learn to read

> Shakespeare when you could be learning something useful? Something that will make you money now, rather than investing in your future career, if you honestly have a career in the future. Why go to school when you can help support your family by working a low-income job? This may seem harsh, but reality is harsh…It may seem hard to believe, but there are parents out there who would rather their parents drop out of school as soon as they can and get a job than finish their education.

This fiery passage recalls a scene in the film *Dangerous Minds* (1995), when Louanne (Michelle Pfeiffer) visits the home of two students who have been absent for some time. She has an encounter with the boys' grandmother, who insists that her grandsons need to work to pay the bills, not read poetry. We screened that film later in the semester, but Brigid owned the film and seemed to favor it. All the same, her points about the socio-economic stratification of literacy seem to be heartfelt, particularly in regard to the arguments of Franzen and Postman. She reiterates, "My point…is that television and the new digital culture cannot be solely blamed for the decline in literacy. The argument, however pointless it may be, cannot be so simply defined as TV versus book."

Brigid briefly invokes the notion of the inevitability of cultural change when she observes, "…change is frightening for some, and they will continue to cling to the past as a safety blanket." However, considering how the focus of her essay centers on literacy and social class, she posits that change may not be a bad thing, if it means that the underprivileged have a chance at the educational wealth of the United States. As she suggests, "[i]lliterate people cannot survive easily in an educated society, and as long as that remains true they will continue to educate themselves in whatever way it takes."

Brigid does not dismiss the value of education and literacy for all, far from it. She instead suggests that literacy be disseminated to and valued equally for all if any literacy debate can have relevance.

Brigid constructs for herself a paradoxical identity as both rebel and dedicated scholar in her final reflective essay. The value of the course for her is a chance to be "on the other side of the desk, so to speak." Her multifaceted identity as a student accomplishes a couple things for her: she can claim a critical questioning stance while still embracing the value of a higher education. Brigid describes herself in high school as "…the student that every teacher hated. I questioned everything, always trying to find the flaws in what they were saying, never wanting to totally accept what they were trying to teach. I loved finding holes in their information or questioning the theories they put forth." In addition, she indicated that she "partied in high school, probably way more than I should, and still kept my grades up." She portrays this younger version of herself as "a nuisance," and regrets her behavior. However, she was named valedictorian (although she admits the teachers and student body were a bit surprised by that announcement), and considering she relates her story with gusto, suggests her identity has been strategically constructed to maximize her rebel image.

Brigid's image of herself has, I think, more to do with establishing herself as on opposite of many of her teachers, rather than a dedication to her wild ways, because she remembers

> …the teachers who just didn't care. They didn't want to be there, and they didn't care if their students wanted to be there or not. For them, teaching was a job, not a lifestyle and that is what made them bad at it. I didn't

> realize this then, but after learning about teaching methods and some of the ideologies behind it, I know now. That is what all those teachers in high school upset me so much and why I found such joy in tormenting them. I was upset that they didn't enjoy what they were doing and were bad at it because I loved to learn so much, and even if no one could tell.

Brigid depicts herself as the intelligent, unruly proto-academic straining against the limitations of her secondary schooling. In all fairness, this portrayal is most likely not far from the mark, because Brigid was an exceptionally enthusiastic, engaged, and perceptive member of the class, and I admired the very critical stance that she says "tormented" her teachers so much. Thus, I remain somewhat suspicious of the image she relates, in that such an image comprises an attempt to show herself a promising student and acolyte into the higher education community.

Brigid, like many others, indicates that the course evoked questions she had not considered before, as she "had no idea there were whole books debating the methods for teaching or what was making it better." In fact she relates that these issues made their way into conversations with her friends:

> We talked about politics, movies, what we were reading, and what we had been learning in our classes. Most of my friends were and still are of a rather intellectual merit, so our conversations were not always of stupid teenage stuff. Never once can I remember us talking about literacy. Once I started this class, it was all I could think about when we would start in on our discussions and soon, I had my friends as interested in it as I was.

These conversations as Brigid describes them, though, still show signs of allegiance to academic excellence, because she recalls one topic that occupied everyone's thoughts: "The one everyone I knew found to be most interesting was the thought of 'striving for the middle' or 'just wanting to be average'….[T]hat is something that not one of my friends could understand." It makes sense that Rose's account would resonate in complex ways with beginning college students, because such a foreign concept flies against anyone who would want to join a competitive, knowledge- and- literacy-based economy, and goes against all behaviors that would have gotten them to college in the first place.

Despite all Brigid's gains in critical thinking and her wild girl image, she still affirms the supremacy of literacy in her conclusion: "Whether we want to honestly learn or whether school is just a stepping stone to a career, it does not matter, literacy is key to life in our present world. There is so much more than just simple reading and writing, and I see that now." Understandably, Brigid, like her classmates, uses the opportunity to assure her instructor that she has indeed learned her lessons, and that she is a better person for it. However, again, there's much more to these essays than currying favor with the instructor. They are pledges of allegiance, vows of citizenship for those who are just beginning their training in a literacy-based economy. To question too rigorously the reign of academic-style literacy is to jeopardize one's chances to amass the socially-valorized literacy skills and credentials crucial to social advancement.

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So, what are we to make of what these students write? The writers, I would suggest, illustrate what Brandt calls "accumulations of literacy." The phrase describes the piling-up of different literacy standards, practices, and values as a culture develops and

changes. Such advances demand new literacy practices, but previous forms of literacy remain, trailing along, inextricably attached. Toni Morrison said that "the past is more infinite than the future," meaning that the past trails along in our wake as we surge into the future, always shaping our present. Brandt's accumulations of literacy operate in much the same way. Previous versions of valued literacy practices are always coloring subsequent literacies. These students find ways to assert the necessity and propriety of change while still honoring the previous literacy forms that have shaped them in earlier academic work.

As Brandt asserts,

> This accumulation of literacy—shaped out of economic struggles, victories, and losses of the past—provides an increasingly intricate set of incentives, sources, and barriers for learning to read and write. The contexts of contemporary literacy learning grow ideologically dense, rife with latent forms of older literacy at play alongside emerging forms….Rapid changes in literacy and education may not so much bring rupture from the past as they bring accumulation of different and proliferating pasts, a piling up of literate artifacts and signifying practices that can haunt the sites of literacy learning. These complicated amalgamations of literacy's past, present, and future formulate the interpretive puzzles faced by current generations of literacy learners. (104)

Brandt is also quick to point out that

> [l]iteracy is always in flux, learning to read and write necessitates an engagement with that flux, with the layers of literacy embodied in

> materials, tools, sponsorship patterns, and the social relationships we have with people who are teaching us to read and write. Indeed, as changes in literacy have speeded up over the course of the twentieth century literate ability has become more and more defined as an ability to position and reposition oneself amid the flux. (104)

These students, once they reach college, are faced with a difficult environment in which to write about literacy. Because their essays become, in many ways, public documents that could possibly be scrutinized for oaths of fealty to the academic and literate enterprise, the student writers must simultaneously juggle previous forms of valued literacy, while learning Myers' "new" literacy or "higher" literacy. In addition, because each different form of literacy cannot be discarded, students must deal with a number of layers of literacy in their writing.

In addition, this assignment illustrates the precarious situation we put students in when we ask them to analyze critically issues and theories of literacy. As Stuckey insists, we live in a culture in which literacy does an enormous amount of work to support the economic and cultural status quo. Therefore, any student interested in reaping the social advancement opportunities that literacy promises (but may or may not deliver) dares not question too rigorously our culture's basic assumptions about literacy. These essays show how intricately and skillfully the students dance around their own beliefs, practices, and values about literacy.

## Notes

1. Gabe includes his real last name in his title, which I omitted.

# Chapter 4

## "I'd Feel Like I Was Cheating Myself": Creative Writing Students' Memories, Values, and Resource Allocation

One of the most thought-provoking passages in Richard E. Miller's book *Writing at the End of the World* occurs in the opening chapter, "The Dark Night of the Soul." Miller muses,

> If you're in the business of teaching others how to read and write with care, there's no escaping the sense that your labor is increasingly irrelevant. Indeed, one way to understand the dark, despairing character of so much of the critical and literary theory that has come to dominate the humanities over the past two decades is to see this writing as the defensive response of those who have recognized but cannot yet admit that the rise of technology and the emergence of a global economy have diminished the academy's cultural significance. (5)

At first glance, this project may seem to confirm Miller's suspicions. One of the premises, after all, of New Literacy Studies is that literacy, in and of itself, is important only when a given culture assigns it value. And as Brandt's work shows, the emergence of a knowledge economy greatly affects how and why students approach new literacy

learning. However, as Brandt also points out, literacy (in all its meanings) does not go gently into the night:

> The goodness of reading, the shame of poor spelling or handwriting, and the pride of cultivated taste, all remnant features of an earlier "moral economy" of literacy, continued to circulate in resilient and convoluted ways mixing with newer incentives and values. The intrinsic tenacity of literacy to preserve—best of all, to preserve itself—kept older traditions around, piling up at the scenes of literacy learning, circulating latently, sometimes even carried in on the force of new practices or the appearance of new sponsors. (192)

Brandt's point that literacy preserves itself resonates particularly strongly in this chapter. Our culture continues to value literacy highly, in all its manifestations, and those values reveal themselves in the memories, values, and choices that our students make.

Bear in mind that the students in the Introduction to Creative Writing course did not have the benefit of an entire semester of exploring issues of literacy and education, like the Critical Analysis and Writing students did. For that reason, their responses bring to light the complicated cultural mechanisms involved in pursuing a college education in ways that the Critical Analysis and Writing students cannot. Examinations of the literacy questionnaires that the Creative Writing students completed reveal that while the Creative Writing students recall similar sponsorship as the memories of the Critical Analysis and Writing students, their values about literacy confirm Brandt's notions of literacy accumulation and preservation. Because of all these layers of literacy values, then,

students feel compelled to prioritize and compartmentalize their reading and writing choices in college through a complex method of resource allocation.

### Memories

For the students in the class, like those in the Critical Analysis and Writing class, family often figures most prominently in their memories of literacy. Some, like Sophia, Colin, and Naomi, recall their mothers as prominent influences on their literacy. Isabella and Sara, on the other hand, report that their fathers loomed large in their literate development. Most, though, could not pinpoint a single family member who most affected their literacy learning; in fact, memories of reading and writing were bound up in extended-family relationships. One student, Blaine, remembered familial influence but devoted much more time to vividly-described memories of beloved books. In addition, many students, most notably Siobhan, Erika, and Sydney, recall how extensively schooling figures in their memories of early literacy.

Sophia was one of the more quiet students, though when she spoke, she did so from a great deal of experience. Though only 28 at the time of the class, she was divorced and was raising a young son. While only two members of her family pursued an education beyond high school, she was raised valuing a postsecondary education. Both sets of grandparents finished their high school educations, but her father graduated from radiography school "at the top of his class," and her mother attended cosmetology school after she and her brother had left home. Many members of her family, though, engage in reading and writing for personal enjoyment. Her mother and grandmother write poetry and short stories, and her brother is writing a novel. Sophia remembers her mother playing a vital role in her early literacy learning. Her mother read to her "constantly,"

Sophia recalls, and used those times to teach Sophia to read: "It was always a game. She would read the book and then let me try to read it to her. We played matching games with letters and numbers—she was a wonderful teacher." One of the books that they read together holds a special significance: "I remember one book in particular, 'Pete the Parakeet.' I memorized the book word for word and would tell people I could read and they believed me! I thought I was sooo smart!"

Colin was unafraid of changing the color of his spiky hair. When class started, his hair was a medium brown, but midway through the semester, it was very black but still spiky. When I saw him the next semester, it remained the unnaturally glossy black of an inexpensive dye purchased at a retail store. Though quiet, he was not the brooding stereotype of a talented writer. He sat in class in ripped jeans and his comments were quietly witty, though unfortunately (or, perhaps, fortunately) most of the class probably did not hear them. He seems to have developed quite devoted attitudes toward literacy through a wealth of sponsors—familial, educational, and recreational. His father received a bachelor's degree in accounting, and while his mother went to a technical school, Colin sees her as the most influential figure in his literacy learning. Colin recalls reading the Berenstain Bears books with her when he was four or five. "I remember this," Colin says, "because it was one of the first books I ever read and I know how excited both my mom and I were about it." Colin's mother was also influential because she stressed the value of education to him: "She never went to college so she always wanted to make sure my brother and I were able to enjoy the college experience that she never had, and the way she saw us being able to experience that was to get the best education we could."

While Colin reports that he does not do much reading and writing currently with peers or friends because most "just aren't interested," he does recall doing a great deal of reading and writing with a high school friend. They were head editors of their school paper, which won several awards under their stewardship, and shared their enthusiasm for their high school English classes. Colin reports, "I still send almost all of my papers to him to do a peer review before I turn them in." For Colin a wealth of literacy sponsors seems to have contributed to a deeply-ingrained set of cultural literacy values that he eloquently champions.

Naomi, like the sisters of Caitlin in the Critical Analysis and Writing class, was home-schooled. She recalls that her parents started educating her early because she was so eager to read. Because home-schooling provides extensive hands-on literacy sponsorship on the part of parents, Naomi's memories of her early literacy learning revolve around her mother and father. While she reports both parents being very influential in her learning, her mother figures more prominently in her responses: "…I remember my Mother buying and giving me books to read so I was constantly reading something. Also,…I remember spending a lot of time at the library picking out books. My Mom was very good at taking me as soon as I ran out of reading material." Parents who home-school their children provide fascinating contrast with parents who send their children to school. While sponsorship is in many ways easier to pinpoint in home-schooling families, the basic motivations for sponsorship remain essentially similar. Both kinds of parents work actively and explicitly to secure the benefits of literacy for their children. Naomi's parents are no exception in that through home-schooling they not only

endeavored to teach their children to read and write, but just as importantly, they invested time and money in obtaining the materials for their children's literacy.

Isabella was a bubbly, raven-haired young woman who turned a speech to her sorority into a deliciously witty short story in the voice of a tightly-wound, inordinately self-important sorority president (the opposite of Isabella herself). She reports that both her parents received college educations, and seem to be the first in her family to have done so. Her grandparents completed high school. Her sister is currently a high school student, but as Isabella mentions, "[i]n our household, there was never any question of receiving the highest education possible. I never wondered if I would go to college."

Like Sophia, Isabella recalls asking her father to read books to her so often that she would have the entire text memorized, and she would then "read" to him. The first book she remembers actually reading was called *Dragon in a Wagon*; she describes "sitting in bed with my parents on a Saturday morning and sounding out the words" to the book. In fact, Isabella remembers reading with her father until she was in middle school, and she says they still share books. Her father gave her her first diary, which she has been keeping since she was eight. Her father also regularly read her Xanga site. Xanga.com is a popular weblog community that offers a free forum to publish a diary online.

In addition to the support she received from her family, Isabella reports that her friends have often figured prominently in her literacy life. When she was younger she and her friends would pass around books in the American Girls and Babysitters Club series. In fact, they would even participate in group storytelling by changing the endings to something they preferred to the printed original. In addition, Isabella is currently the president of the book club in her sorority.

Sara was a good friend of Isabella's. Physically, she was the opposite of Isabella, blond, blue-eyed, but just as effervescent. At one point in the semester, she had to miss class to attend a cousin's wedding in the Hamptons, which the class found funny because the world connoted by a wedding in the Hamptons seemed foreign to Sara's personality. Sara herself, though she described her background as upper-middle class, seemed uncomfortable with her relatives' social status. Her parents and grandparents (on both sides) graduated from college, and she reports that "it is expected" that children in her generation will attend college. Her father played a vital role in her early literacy learning. She recalls him reading to her all the time when she was a child:

> I remember he would read Cinderella and Alice in Wonderland to my brother, sister, and myself and would change the words around and we would get so mad. (Ex. He would say Prince Charlie, his name, instead of Prince Charming.) There are pictures of my dad reading the newspaper to me while I was in my highchair.

In addition to this account of Sara's father actively engaging his children in the reading experience by strategically altering known narrative facts to provoke a reaction, the comment about reading to Sara in her high chair suggests, as Brandt has explained, the extent to which parents will capitalize on any opportunity to secure literacy and educational advantage for their children. Not unlike the CDs that insist that Mozart makes kids smarter, parents seize any opportunity to acclimate their children to literacy and socially-validated language use.

Sara believes that in addition to her family's educational achievements, the absence of cable television in her home had a big influence on her literacy practices. She

sees the absence of cable as critical to her love of reading. “My family has only had cable for 5 years,” Sara says, “so I spent most of my childhood reading.” Sara even considers the lack of cable television in her home the most influential event in her literacy learning: “I never really had anything else to do on the weekends and would sit in my room and read (assuming it as cold and none of my friends could play.)” Sara reports that her reading life remains very active. She says that she has been known to “have three or four books going at a time.” Her main love is mystery novels. She lists among her favorite authors James Patterson, Alex Cross, and Janet Evanovich. However, she does not like to write in the mystery genre; she only likes to read it. In fact, she reports not writing much, in favor of reading, and not liking to share her writing when she does. Sara seems to place substantially more value on the reading end of the literacy spectrum, and not as much on writing.

Grace, the self-professed “Grammar Nazi” of the class, was a junior at the time she took Introduction to Creative Writing. Most of her relatives, including her mother and grandparents, finished high school, though she said her mother attended college for a little while. Her father received a bachelor’s degree. “I think,” Grace muses, “that the level of education my parents have had encouraged them to teach me to read and write at an early age, and I believe being able to read fosters a love of learning.” Grace mentions the inspiration of her parents in her learning literacy, but yet her love of learning seems to come from within her. She does not connect her love of learning with her parents’ encouragement, as she does with their influence in learning to read and write.

As with many students, her first memories of reading and writing are mingled with the physical affection she shared with relatives. For example, she recalls, “…my

mother teaching me how to write my name and my father holding me while I read aloud to him." She also has many of memories of multiple relatives encouraging her reading: "My parents (and grandparents for that matter) had a lot of books for me to read and spent a lot of time with me in their laps, helping me to sound out words and letting me read to them." Grace's family shows a large number of early literacy sponsors who not only invested material resources in Grace's literacy learning (they "had a lot of books for me to read"), but also devoted "a great deal of time" to making sure Grace learned to read and write well. Grace also recalls some gender-based differences to her parents' sponsorship, in that her father exercised the most influence in how she learned to read, but her mother was more influential in how she learned to write.

Subsequent literacy sponsors, though, become less defined for Grace. She does not, for instance, do much writing with her peers, other than for school projects: "I have done writing projects with fellow classmates, as group projects or as peer-reviewed works. As for reading with peers or friends, unless reading the same assigned works as everyone else counts, I haven't and do not do so." Grace's comments bring up an interesting concept—that of a university's English department, as opposed to individual teachers, as a literacy sponsor. Each English class, as Grace suggests, becomes a literacy sponsor, particularly for English majors. However, Grace does not seem to perceive her classmates or professors as important sponsors, preferring to see her literacy as driven by her own ambitions.

Lily knew she needed to get out of Oklahoma. Dressed either in fatigues or gauzy skirts, she was tiny—under five feet tall. She had the moxie, though, of someone three times her size. One day in class, she recounted the story of her flight to San Francisco to

see her boyfriend, in which she was stuck sitting next to a garrulous Texas businessman. She told him she was visiting California, and as they deplaned, he drawled, "Enjoy the land of nuts, fruits, and flakes!" She was so perturbed by the exchange that she turned the experience into a wonderful poem, both blistering and lyrical, in defense of California to those living in the country's midsection. Lily's parents both have master's degrees, and three of her four grandparents have bachelor's degrees. She and her brother were pursuing their bachelor's degrees while Lily was in this class. Her parents were both teachers, and she recalls that "their jobs (much to my advantage) always came home with them." They read to Lily every night before bed, but even so, Lily's first memory of reading occurred at her grandparents' house:

> My first memory of reading was "Hop on Pop" by Dr. Seuss. I was probably five or so. I was over at my grandmother's and it was the first time I read an entire book by myself. I guess I just felt pretty smart. My mom has never really liked Dr. Seuss. She thinks it is funny that I remember this experience so well, because she and my father have been reading with me since before I was born.

Kathie was a talented graphic artist who invited me to the juried show that the Art Department sponsored every year. Because those shows are so competitive, it is an honor to be selected. She seemed genuinely touched that I attended, and insisted that I meet her family. In addition to her artistic talents, she was a discerning reader and writer who was not afraid to express her opinions in class. She was equally candid in her literacy narrative questionnaire regarding her views in literacy and its relationship to one's character. She reported that she is one of the few women in her family to go to college

and the second to graduate. “I don’t know if I want to call it a pride thing,” she remarks, “but I want to know that I can rise above my family’s standard and that I’m not destined to live in a dive because I didn’t have the right education.” Kathie reports that her grandmother, aunt, and uncle graduated with bachelor’s degrees and her uncle completed graduate school in physical therapy. Her parents, though, completed high school, but not college. Her father was in the military, and received some supplemental training there, and her mother had recently started taking some classes at a local community college. Kathie relates that she remembers “looking down on my mom when I started college and realized I was surpassing her in education.”

Blaine was an unusual addition to the class. He was a guy’s guy who enjoyed hunting and athletics, but also clearly appreciated the written word and admired the writer’s craft. Though he did not participate often, he observed the class meetings with a smile which suggested that a great deal was going on in his head that he was not sharing. He and his mother appear to be the ones in his family who most valued reading and writing. While both his parents graduated from high school, Blaine’s mother attended a community college to study accounting. His brother, at the time Blaine completed the questionnaire, was working toward his bachelor’s degree in Mechanical Engineering. However, Blaine sees little relationship between his own literacy practices and the educational goals of his brother, because his brother’s “education hasn’t affected my literacy skills in any way seeing as how he hates to read and can’t write worth a darn.” Blaine, on the other hand, places much more value on reading and writing. Although he was a broadcasting major interested in meteorology, he took English classes mostly to learn “how to use [language] properly and creatively.” Blaine’s most influential literacy

sponsor was his mother, not only because she is "an avid reader" herself, but also because she purchased books for him regularly.

Blaine's early literacy memories have a great deal of significance for him. For example, he describes his first "real" reading experience as highly influential:

> I would have to say that my first memory of reading a real book would have been reading "Terrible Night of Twisters" or something like that. I was in the third grade and it is the most unforgettable because I loved that book and sence reading it I have aspired to become a meteorologist and that's what I'm studying in school.

Blaine's account is notable because of the lasting effect this one literacy experience had. One book read in third grade continues to exercise its influence in a college sophomore's educational trajectory.

For Blaine, as for many students, the Harry Potter series figures prominently in his literacy history. He lushly describes his first encounter with the Rowling novels:

> I don't know if it was the book or just the atmosphere of where I was reading it but that image is stuck in my brain. It was a cool winter morning with a little bit of drizzle falling. I was out on the covered deck in a chair with a blanket pulled over my head and I must have read 5 or 6 chapters that day.

This memory, so vividly painted, echoes many students' accounts of reading the Harry Potter books. More importantly, though, because Blaine chooses this memory to describe the most influential event in his literacy learning, a pattern appears regarding what Blaine considers "real reading." As he mentions elsewhere, truly literate behavior centers on

narrative forms: “I think that novels are about the only things that are literate. The rest [e-mail, magazines, etc.] don’t really absorb my mind like novels do. When I read something, I have to feel like I’m part of it. The other things just don’t do that for me.” For Blaine, literate reading must transport the reader elsewhere, or so enchant that the reader loses track of time and space. Such a description recalls the pleasures of reading that Birkerts champions.

Many students reported that schooling and teachers had a great deal of influence in their literate development. Some, like Sophia and Isabella, have strong memories of precociousness in school. For example, Sophia recalls,

> I was really ahead of the curve in reading and writing when I started school. I was really bored and got in trouble for talking and being a “show off” for finishing my work so quickly. I remember sitting at my desk a lot waiting for others to finish so I could start on the next assignment.

Sophia’s memory of “being ahead of the curve in reading and writing” prove crucial to Sophia, as we will see later, not only because they reflect the important economic and social opportunities her education offers, but because writing and reading (especially in college) become her passion. This memory is an early example of that.

Isabella was also advanced when she entered school, a common theme for the English majors in the class. She recalls, “I remember being very proud of myself in first grade when we were learning to read silently to ourselves and I already knew how.” Isabella’s school incorporated creative writing into a curriculum that featured a great deal of self-directed reading. She wrote several short stories, and in a poetry-writing unit, the students assembled all of their poems into a self-illustrated book to present to their

parents on Christmas. She adds, "…yes, my parents still have the book on the shelf and pull it out when they want to embarrass me."

Colin also had early teachers who encouraged his writing. In particular, his first grade teacher provided him with the opportunity to express himself through writing: "In my class, the teacher allowed the students to write their own short books and then the library would cover and bind the books. I still have all of the stories I wrote because that was one of my favorite school activities ever." Colin also recalls elementary school as a time when reading became a favored activity:

> As far as reading in elementary school, my fix was the Goosebumps series. I can remember going to the book fair and buying four or five books at a time then staying up late to try to finish them. I also still have all of my Goosebumps books because they were the first books I decided to read on my own.

For Siobhan, early training in journalism class proved to have had a lasting impact on her career goals. Siobhan looked like a model who did not want to be a model. She had long blond hair, razor-sharp cheekbones, and intense blue eyes. She wore long peasant skirts and funky, bulky hats to class. A journalism major, she writes often and "with much enthusiasm." She recalls a paper of hers chosen for publication in the Chicago *Tribune*, complete with picture next to the byline, when she was fifteen. This experience proved influential to her future aspirations in journalism: "This gave me a lot of encouragement as a 15 year old and gave me the confidence I needed to know I had a knack for writing."

Other students, particularly Erika and Sydney, have more memories of educational, rather than familial, encouragement in their reading and writing development. Erika, for example, mentions her parents as important early literacy sponsors, but other sponsors come through more vividly in her memories. Like many students at this university, Erika identifies very strongly with her Native American heritage. Her middle name, for instance, is derived from Cherokee. With her blonde hair and green eyes, though, she is representative of the complex cultural blends that many Oklahomans consider commonplace. She is the first person in her family to go to college. Both parents attended different colleges after high school, but dropped out. "If anything," she says, "I feel being the first in my family to go to college has made me try harder in my schoolwork and be thankful for the education that I have received thus far." Erika, like Brigid in the Critical Analysis and Writing class, holds fond memories of a "passionate" English teacher in high school. She recalls that her teacher

> …left her door open when she taught and she would yell. All underclassmen were terrified of her. She was so intimidating and everyone said she never gave an A on a paper. I was scared of her, but after having her teach me English for 2 years, I loved her. She loves teaching English, it is her true passion and I think that makes all the difference in a teacher. She wasn't an easy teacher and she made sure you knew how to write a great essay.

It is noteworthy that Erika holds the most vivid memories of a teacher that upheld strict standards for writing. Her teacher seems to have instilled the view that good writing requires a strict, almost monastic discipline that Erika has not forgotten. Another literacy

sponsor that Erika has encountered is an internship she participated in with the United States Department of Agriculture:

> I did an internship this summer in DC and got the chance to network with a lot of employees from the USDA. They all have at least a Bachelor's and most have a Masters. I learned there that having a Masters in today's education realm is a must. That is why I have chosen to extend my education. I feel for the career I want to pursue, I need a Bachelor's and it would serve me better if I had a Master's degree also.

Erika is studying agricultural economics, and her experience with her internship seems to have both stiffened her resolve to complete her baccalaureate degree and spurred her interest in an advanced degree. Erika's comments show how governmental agencies and their policies can have profound effects on the choices that students make in their learning.

Sydney, a sunny young woman with round cheeks made even rounder when she smiled—which was all the time—was a light-hearted addition to the class, though she did not speak very frequently. In her family, she had progressed the furthest in her education. Her parents spent about two years in college, as did her brother. Only one of her grandparents finished high school. Her memories of early literacy learning, though, center less on her family and more around her teachers. Her mother appears briefly in her account of learning how to spell her name on her mother's typewriter. Her teachers, though, figure much more prominently. Sydney's 3rd grade teacher, in particular, was particularly influential in her appreciation of reading, and she attributes much of her academic success to the practices her teacher instilled:

> I read more books in that single school year that I have in my entire life. After two semesters in her classroom, my standardized tests somehow labeled me as "gifted." While, I've never felt academically superior to *anyone*…I know that my decline in constant reading corresponded with my decline in "above-average" results.

Sydney places a great deal of emphasis in the relationship between her intellectual progress and her reading levels. Sydney's 3rd-grade year also saw the emergence of school book clubs that provided the occasion for Sydney to read so much. As Sydney relates:

> While book catalogs became a weekly staple in our "take home" folder, we had the opportunity to find a favorite series of youth literature. I opted for none other than the "Babysitter's Club" series. I couldn't get enough. I soon was a part of a mailing club and received three books per month….Not only did I learn any and everything about how to run a 7th grade child sitting business,…my standardized test scores actually peaked that spring. I maintain this to be a direct result if the emphasis she put on reading and getting our noses in the pages *daily*.

The book club Sydney describes is a complex web of different sponsors. While her parents are not mentioned in this passage, they provided the monetary means to keep the books arriving in the mail every month. The book club, by not only rendering the books but also by garnering profit from the venture, is a classic example of Brandt's literacy sponsor. In her study, Brandt heard multiple stories of the prominent place sets of encyclopedias had in her subjects' homes (152). Her teacher, by "getting [their] noses in

the pages daily," enacted her own form of sponsorship brokering between the other two. In addition, we see Sydney even more firmly asserting her belief in the correlation between her higher test scores and the reading she did in 3rd grade.

Later, in 5th and 6th grades, her teachers encouraged Sydney's writing. As with many of the students in the study, the power of publishing student work figures prominently in promoting young writers:

> I can remember revising and editing rough draft after rough draft. Weeks beyond weeks went into preparation and these long processes each ended with big publishing parties which included the opportunities to share our books with one another. While lengthy, I can remember these projects proved to be very rewarding in the end.

Such diverse sponsorship has helped forge in Sydney a rather traditional view of what a literate education will provide. For example, the goal in an English class is to "learn how to be somewhat of a quality writer, whether it be grammatically or creatively, and to continue to promote the importance of reading in my everyday life." The effects of a literate education are myriad, she says, because "[t]he more you read and write, the more complex and exquisite your vocabulary usage becomes. Thereafter, your ability to converse with others often matures, allowing doors to open in many aspects of life and the workplace." E.D. Hirsch, I would wager, could not agree more.

### Values

Like the students in the Critical Analysis and Writing class, the Creative Writing students often conflated "literacy" with "education". While this is hardly surprising, the association of the two terms revealed a great deal of information about the

students'values. For many students, particularly the English majors, a quality post-secondary literate education involved immersing oneself in a cultural literacy model. For others, though, a college education proved crucial to social advancement and highlighting class distinctions. Still others found ways to harness their literacy values to other aspects of their lives that they deeply valued, namely music and religious faith.

Grace, like many of the English majors, relates that she hopes to increase her cultural literacy in her English classes: "I hope to become a better writer from my English classes, but I also want to be more well-read than I currently am. I hope to leave the University with the ability to say, 'Yes, I've read that' for most of the canonical texts." Earlier, she also hits on this theme of cultural improvement: "I love to read, but I'm very picky about what I read. I like fiction, but not thrillers or mysteries. I love the classics—I feel like I'm enriching myself every time I read one."

At first glance, Sophia seems much more practical, as a single mother, in her goals and values. She mentions that she places a great deal of importance on her education:

> I am pursuing my education as a way not only to better myself but also as a way to set a positive example for my son that in order to succeed in life one must gain and use knowledge. I hope that I am successful in this task and that he will realize the importance of education and develop a life-long love affair with literature.

Sophia finds herself in the doubly difficult position of being both literacy learner and literacy sponsor. Not only is she faced with the demands of her own literacy needs, but her comments remind us again of how parents go to any length to secure the benefits of

literacy for their children, to the point of modeling valued behaviors to their children. Note, too, that Sophia emphasizes the "importance of education" and the value of developing "a life-long love affair with literature" for her son, and does not mention the economic benefits of literacy explicitly. This matches her own privileging of cultural literacy in her life. Because she is an English major, she says,

> …English is my passion. I love to immerse myself in another time, place, or culture and experience things I could never otherwise experience. Reading and writing are extremely important in my life. I believe that without the ability to read and write effectively I would not have the opportunities that are now available to me. Reading and writing opens the world to me.

Sophia mentions literacy's potential for social advancement for herself, which she omits when talking about the benefits of reading and writing for her son. However, such references are brief and she moves quickly on to the more general statement about reading opening the world to her, which refers not only to the economic benefits of literacy, but the pleasures that Birkerts details (the ability to "immerse" oneself "in another time, place, or culture"). Later, she indicates that "[r]eading and writing are sources of pleasure, information, entertainment, catharsis, and educational/financial opportunities." Of the five items she enumerates, only two (information and educational/financial opportunities) speak to her underlying goals for advancement. The majority fall more comfortably into the cultural literacy paradigm.

Colin and Isabella embrace cultural literacy, but in slightly different ways than Grace and Sophia. Colin and Isabella articulate the societal benefits of literacy more

clearly than many of their fellow English majors. As we've seen earlier, Colin prizes wit and clever observation, which translates neatly into his taste in books: "My favorite books are usually satirical because I enjoy the dry humor the authors use to make fun of certain social conventions. I don't get to read satire as much as I would like because of my school reading load, but anytime I get the chance I jump on it."

Colin repeatedly stresses the value of literacy as a way to learn about and make sense of the world. As he puts it, "I use reading as my main source of education about the world. You can learn about history, culture, social issues, etc. just by opening up a book." For Colin, the discipline of English provides the most effective means to understand the depth and breadth of human experience:

> To me, English is the way to learn about the world. By reading literature of both your own culture and cultures around the world, you are able to gain a deeper respect for people everywhere. Literature allows people to put themselves in someone else's shoes for a change. You can learn almost anything about a culture or time period just by reading all the literature of the time. You can also put yourself in situations you may never have had the chance to experience in real life, but you can experience it with the characters of the story.

Colin further describes literacy as an antidote to isolationism and provincialism by exposing readers to alternate ways of living:

> I'm pursuing my education because I believe the only way a person can live a fulfilling life is to have the knowledge to appreciate the world around him. Education allows a person's world view to grow, and if their

> world is growing that means they will be willing to try new activities, accept new ideas, and take new chances they might not have ever done before. All I want from my education is to be able to see the world in a different light from many. I want to be able to appreciate everything that is around me, and I believe pursuing an education will allow me to do just that.

Colin seems to conflate "education" with "literacy" in his comments, which makes sense considering his major is English. His education is literacy in many ways, and thus he describes his responsibility to use the cultural literacy he gains from his studies as a way to forge connections between his world and the world of others. Also worthy of note is his ambition to "see the world in a different light from many." Like many students, Colin views his commitment to literacy as something that separates him from an unnamed mass, presumably those who do not value literacy as much as he, and live less fulfilling lives because of it. Colin's comments reflect the common tenet of cultural literacy that "proper" reading (that is, canonical reading) elevates its practitioner to develop a higher, perhaps more objective appreciation of the human condition. In fact, Colin expresses just such a view later: "An individual who is able to read and write well will always have a place in society because even though these are basic skills one should learn in school, the majority rejects them as unnecessary and useless." Here again, Colin portrays the avid reader as an outcast of sorts from the mainstream.

Like Colin, Isabella sees literacy as necessary for citizenship. "From my English classes," she says, "I hope to get a better understanding of literature and I hope to hone

my writing abilities so that someday I will be a competent and intelligent member of society." Isabella reports highly complex motivations for her educational ambitions:

> I am pursuing a higher education so that A) I can get a good job and make a decent income B) because in my family there was never really any other option and C) I am hoping that I will be able to share my passion for reading and writing with the world, whether through publishing or teaching.

Her reasons for attaining a degree weave into each other: economic advancement blends with her possible teaching career, her family's values about education mix with her own appreciation of literature.

Isabella reports that she has "a list about five miles long" of books she wants to read and that she is "never without a book to read." Her tastes are varied: she lists historical novels (like Philippa Gregory) as favorites, as well as Jane Austen, Sylvia Plath, John Keats, and Emily Dickinson. She also includes the Harry Potter books in her list, as well as Anne Rice, Ayn Rand, C.S. Lewis, and Nora Roberts. The words Isabella repeatedly uses when she writes about reading are entertainment, education, and catharsis. Again, we find Isabella squarely in the realm of cultural literacy in the kinds of practices she values and prefers.

For many students, literacy is an important marker for class distinctions and facilitating social advancement. For example, Sara sees a difference between those who pursue a post-secondary education and those who do not. As she puts it,

> …having conversations with people in college (who are actually succeeding) and people who are not attending college are very different.

> People who are not currently attending college have a very narrow view on the world/life, when talking with my friends the conversation, simply put, is more intellectual.

Sara's comments resonate on a couple of levels. She delineates the college-educated from the non-college-educated, and she also distinguishes between those who are currently attending college from those who may have attended some time in the past. By differentiating those "who are not currently attending college," she suggests that a college education, at the time it is occurring, offers intellectual opportunities that may diminish if left fallow after graduation.

Kathie remains constantly aware of her own educational achievements, particularly in relation to those of her family. One of her brothers took some classes at the same community college that her mother did, and her other brother dropped out of high school. The experience of this brother has led Kathie to believe very strongly in the power of education:

> I know that education is a choice because my brother dropped out of high school and that was his choice. It is quite noticeable that he can't solve life's simple problems, like cleaning out the garage, working a job, or even wash his clothes. One could say he's lazy but it seems he struggles with problem solving and critical thinking. This makes me believe that reading, writing, and education really does play a big part in developing the brain.

Kathie's comments reflect the common idea that literacy has cognitive effects. Hers are one of the best student examples of the Great Divide Theory as forwarded by scholars

like Jack Goody. In a way, she is not incorrect. As Brian Street explains, the work of Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner found that while literacy itself does not affect cognition, education itself does, in the sense that it acclimates students to socially-valued ways of thinking (104). Kathie's use of literate ability as a marker of mental facility is also expressed in her relations with others: "If I run across someone who can't read well or makes numerous unintentional errors then I'll automatically label them stupid. Maybe it's not their fault they are that way but nothing prevents you from learning." Here again, as with her brother, Kathie makes complex connections not only between literacy and cognitive ability, but literacy and moral fiber. Kathie's remarks seem to convey an idea that education is often a matter of pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps. She views her own literacy practices in a similar way, in that one of the benefits of an English class is the opportunity to internalize approved language forms:

> Whenever I took an English class, whether it be writing or literature, I was hoping to find eloquent ways of expressing myself. It may sound silly but when I read something and it really sticks in my mind I try to find out what about the author's technique that made it do that. I'd like to think that if I could master this, I'll be hard to forget (in a good way).

Kathie holds similar standards for herself that she holds for others. She knows that people will scrutinize her just as stringently for her language use as she does for those she comes in contact with. In a sense, Kathie seems to measure her social worth by her literacy skills. She is certainly not unusual among her peers in that belief.

Kathie holds similarly conservative views about the state of communication as currently practiced. Her definition of literate activity, for example, reveals a concern for convenient electronically mediated communication:

> I view things like reading books or magazines as literate because texting or e-mail can be so degenerative. At one time, correspondence was an art in itself and lately it has become so fragmented and harsh to the ear and eye. I guess being literate to me means you can comprehend something beyond the everyday language.

Here we see again the worth Kathie places in well-used language. In addition, she also reveals a view of literacy that values "comprehend[ing]…beyond everyday language," the notion that truly literate communication contains polysemic layers that an appreciative audience enjoys sifting through.

Kathie elaborates on those ideas later, adding a new twist, that of using literacy as a means to demonstrate a letter writer's esteem for a reader:

> If I really care for someone I'll take the time to write them a letter. I feel there's a particular sort of intimacy in the act and that person will have something to hold on to and read later on. Also, when there's other faster ways of communication I think a letter shows you think they are worth the time and effort it takes to write it. I judge other people by how they write. If the average person can knock my socks off in their blog with beautiful writing while describing a crummy day, then I'll tend to give them points in my book.

In addition to the idea that a letter writer shows she cares about her reader by writing a pen-and-paper letter, Kathie also indicates that writing a letter, like writing a poem or novel, is creating a work that is meant to last. A consubstantiated piece of writing, by its very tangibleness, flirts with the realm of literature. Kathie reiterates, as well, her high regard for those who have mastered the conventions of validated language forms, even in genres as contemporary as the blog.

Erika has similar views about the assimilative power of specific forms of literacy. Her college career so far, she feels, has confirmed how literacy affects one's social connections:

> Reading and writing were never really important in my life until I came [to college]. Now I realize how great of an impact your writing can have on you as a person. Not only do your professors notice your spelling, grammar and writing styles, but also concerning job applications, scholarship essays and even ones resume….A lot of times people see your writing before they even meet you, so it is important that your writing techniques are neat and correct.

For that reason, she says, she wants to use her English classes to review her knowledge of language conventions ("grammar and sentences"), because, as she puts it, "[i]t seems those small grammatical errors are so easy to forget and your writing can make a big first impression. It is important in today's society to be able to write correctly and well."

Erika is therefore somewhat dubious of emerging communication forms when defining literate forms from substandard forms. While electronic and advertising communication might technically be considered literate, she also feels that

> …deep under the surface, some are not literate. Like text-messaging and some e-mails, they are pretty to the point and use symbols and acronyms. If you weren't from this day and age and from the USA, one might not understand them. So, in that I think it is safe to say that a lot of communication through cell phones and Internet today can be classified as not literate. However, with billboards and magazines they can be on the illiterate side also. Since these ads have limited space, it is difficult to follow all rules of grammar and punctuation and most are confined to the "21st century way of communication". By that I mean, slang words and acronyms. Something that would never have been put on a billboard twenty years ago, but it is okay today. I personally think most all college readings and public schedule/announcements are very literate. To me, they are required to hold up a much higher standard in how they communicate to the public….I think novels are literate….It might be the author's style of writing to verge away from the "normal" path of writers.

Erika holds a conservative view of "true" literacy that implies standards from the past which should continue to endure. Her view also stresses that literate communication must have the ability to translate into other socio-historical contexts, hence her view of the limited meaning of e-mails and text-messaging with their acronyms and symbols. Most of all, however, literate communication must "hold up a standard" that incorporates a mastery of valued language use that "verge[s] away from the 'normal' path of writers."

Siobhan and Lily are two students with very different majors who use their recreational literacy for similar purposes. Both are very interested in music, and in class

they drew many connections between music and creative writing. For instance, they, like many students in my creative writing classes, often adapted their own song lyrics into poems. Such connections between music and literary writing are common, both in literature and in writing scholarship. One thinks, for example, of Willa Cather's extended exploration of Thea's musical journey as an allegory for the life of all artists in her novel *Song of he Lark*. Music figures largely in the literacy life of Barbara Hunt, a young woman featured in Brandt's study. Barbara mentioned that "[s]ong lyrics that she heard on the radio also helped her reflect on her life…. 'Songs to me are like some books and some speeches,' she said, 'when they seem to be exactly what your life is'" (40). Siobhan and Lily are excellent examples how music and literary activity merge as artistic endeavors for many creative writing students.

Siobhan makes multiple references to her goals of using her writing in the music industry. She writes reviews for bands in the student newspaper, and she also writes press releases and band biographies. She clearly enjoys these activities and wishes to pursue them professionally: "I want to be able to use writing to do what I want to do in life which is working with bands and musical artists."

Like Siobhan, Lily places a great deal of emphasis on music. Most of her writing, for example, is comprised of songs. She also places listening to music among her list of literate activities: "I would consider reading novels, poetry, short stories, stage plays, writing poetry, and listening to music [as literate activities]. I think they are literate because they require some thought process, some 'decoding' if you will." However, she observes that music takes priority over other art forms for her sustained attention:

> Reading and writing fall just behind music. So, unfortunately although I consider them valuable, I will always relax while listening to an album before reading. I have recently forgotten how much I love reading and writing. They are coming to the forefront of my consciousness. When I have more time this summer, I'm sure I will be reading and writing much more than I am now.

As with many of her colleagues, this issue of time creeps in as a factor in Lily's reading and writing life. However, she will, I suspect, come through on her promise of writing more, because she was a talented poet with a flair for concise language and a lyricism gained from her musical interests. Her reading life, though, remains a pleasurable adjunct to her musical pursuits:

> I love reading. When I finally get something started, I tend to disappear until it is finished. I'm always sorry when a book is over….I don't read as much as I'd like to. I don't think about it as much as music. I love to read catchy, overtly interesting books—very descriptive, enthralling (e.g. Kerouac and Vonnegut).

Lily describes a pleasant reading experience that is not that different from listening to music. Her emphasis on books she can "disappear" into, and her preference for books that "enthrall" her, both suggest a reader who likes to read as a musical aficionado would to a recording—total immersion during the experience. Lily's methods of consuming art are similar for both genres.

Initially, Naomi mentions that she is pursuing her education for reasons of self-improvement. She also notes that social advancement plays a part. As she says,

> I want to pursue my education because I think it will help me for the rest of my life. I have recently begun to see how little I really know and I would like to know as much as possible before I enter the "real world." Also, I think you receive more respect and get better jobs with education.

In Naomi's comments, as with almost all of the students in the study, the prospect of social advancement inevitably creeps in. However, Naomi does not emphasize economic benefit to the extent that many of her colleagues do. Instead, her literacy practices and the values she places on them revolve more around her faith and religious life.

For example, most of what she reads outside of school centers on religion. As she says, "I read a lot of fiction and religious 'self-help' books outside of school….[M]ost of them are about following Christ." In addition, she takes part in sharing texts with peers in her church group: "Most of my reading with friends has been through Bible-studies and church events. I have also swapped books with a lot of friends and we obviously chat about it after. I would love to join a book club after college." We see, again, in her last sentence a deferment of literacy activity until after she completes her education. While she does not explicitly mention issues of time or "resource allocation," Naomi still seems to feel that the benefits of a book club need to be postponed until her academic needs have been met.

While Naomi makes it clear that her faith plays an important part of her literacy practice (in fact, many of the poems and stories she submitted for class contained clear religious themes,) her tastes and preferences are more complex and not all of her choices and values can be directly traced to her faith. Naomi also appreciates reading's ability to transport readers elsewhere:

> I think I love to read because it allows me to see and experience things I haven't and never will. I love to be transported to another world and I guess I escape into a good book or story….I love to read fiction but tend to read more religious works because those are easier to read the back and know what it will be about. I also don't enjoy a lot of …sex in books so I am hesitant about reading some fiction because I don't want to dislike the book. And I'm not terribly fond of religious fiction because I feel like a lot of it is written to teach and preach and not wrap you up as much in the story.

There are several layers to how Naomi appreciates a book. The influence of her faith is apparent, particularly in her avoidance of books with "a lot of sex" in them. However, she seems to favor religiously-themed books in non-fiction genres. That she prefers religious books because they "are easier to read the back and know what [they] will be about" speaks to both a very purposeful approach to reading non-fiction (that is, Naomi has specific needs in mind when she undertakes a non-fiction book and she makes sure the book will deliver.) Naomi shows an ease in letting herself initially be transported by a work of fiction. She wants to go on the ride, but sours quickly if the ride takes her someplace she does not like. She places a great deal of importance on the power of narrative to enthrall the reader, to the point that she eschews religious fiction (which one would assume she would value highly) if the story is not sufficiently engaging.

Like Naomi, Sydney places a great of emphasis on the religious uses of her personal literacy. Most of the recreational reading she does with peers, for example, centers on the Bible:

> …I would say the most reading/writing I've done with my peers would revolve around bible studies. We'd assign a chapter or two out of a specific book, and then take notes, write summaries, and compare what each of us got out of the passage….[R]ight now I'm studying 1 Corinthians, and this summer I'll be getting into 1 Peter.

In addition, Sydney reports that most of her outside reading and writing on her own "deals with getting into The Word—I attempt it daily, but it doesn't always happen. Along with reading specific passages, I try to keep a journal to coincide with my quiet times."

Sydney's views about the economic benefits of literacy are affected by what her family has been able to do with limited schooling. As she says,

> While English interests me more than any other subject, and I regard reading, writing, and learning on a very high scale…I have also been able to witness that without a professed education, people are able to succeed in the business world and become financially triumphant.

Sydney seems to have instinctively grasped what Harvey Graff argued, that literacy itself is not necessarily an indication of one's potential for success; rather, Graff asserts race and class are better determiners of advancement than educational level. All the same, her response is unusual in that she considers that success is possible without the benefit of an extensive education. Most of her colleagues make no mention of that possibility.

With all these values in place, though, Sydney still maintains that her faith provides the lion's share of impetus for her own literacy practices:

> My relationship with reading is currently mediocre. I would love to say otherwise, but let's be honest. I read when I have to. I read because I feel as though I must....While this is something I'm aware I should change—it hasn't. The vast majority of my reading comes from scripture, which I DO enjoy…but it's definitely a different experience than a good novel. I often lack the patience and willpower to read. It goes to show HOW lazy I have become, and the negative effects that television/film may have. While I don't feel I do it enough…I truly DO delight in furthering my understanding of the Bible. There's a lot there—and it's my desire to know that book inside and out someday. While I often question many of the things written in it, regarding various issues—I feel if I was able to receive the proper context throughout the entire thing, it would be far more beneficial. It would then allow me to mold and solidify my personal convictions and beliefs.

Sydney's account, like those of Kathie and many other students, show how pervasive and deeply-seated moral conceptions of literacy continue to be in this part of the country. Note, for example, that Sydney not only considers the "negative influence" of television and film on her reduced reading, but she first blames her own laziness on her lack of reading. In addition, she confesses to lacking the "patience and willpower to read." Sydney's literacy practices, as she describes them, are related to character, both flaws and virtues. Therefore, her literacy, particularly where the Bible is concerned, is a journey in strategic self-improvement.

## Resource Allocation

In their questionnaires, many students articulated some complex reasons why their literacy practices did not always mesh with the values they detail. Their responses illuminate many of the underlying social influences to the reading and writing choices these students make. Because these students have grown up immersed in an economy and culture that commodifies literacy, many mention feeling compelled to compartmentalize and prioritize their literacy practices to best profit from the benefits of being a literate in an information economy.

Kathie, for instance, reports that she is not enjoying the forms of literacy she would like because of time constraints. She mentions that when she was younger, she had more time for reading, and listed her favorites, from Lillian Jackson Braun and R.L. Stine to Roald Dahl. Her current reading life, though, is not as satisfactory:

> My "reading life" is lacking at the moment. With my busy schedule it's hard to read anything for leisure….[I]f I were to take the time out to read something other than my text book I'd feel like I was cheating myself out of study time.

Like many of her colleagues, the thought of enjoying literacy for personal enjoyment seems a luxury ill-afforded when she should be consuming the texts that more readily match the goals of graduation, job qualification, and economic advancement.

Like Kathie, Blaine also laments the time constraints that prevent him from enjoying the reading he would like to do. He mentions that he has "a ton of books" in his library but because he is always so busy with other responsibilities he cannot get to them as often as he would like:

> I enjoy reading; it takes me away and lets me relax but I just can't afford to lose time on books that aren't for school right now. I have been reading more and more lately. I used to never read and now I have a book with me almost always. I love to read Christian books about faith and how God and/or the Bible relate to other things. They help me stay grounded in my faith and are a constant reminder that God is everywhere.

A couple of things stand out in Blaine's comments. The first is how important Blaine, like Naomi and Sydney discussed earlier, views literacy as a means to bolster his religious life and explore his faith. His remarks demonstrate the continued presence of earlier forms of literacy that forwarded reading and writing as necessary moral practices. More interesting, though, is Blaine's notion of reading for pleasure as "los[ing] time" or taking time and energy away from reading that is not related to school. There is a sense that Blaine rigidly prioritizes his literate time strategically, and school-based literacy (studying textbooks, writing term papers) must take priority for now. Reading for pleasure must take a back seat to the literacy that most clearly leads to economic advancement.

As we've seen earlier, Grace's aims for her education seem to square cleanly with the cultural literacy of Hirsch. However, those ambitions become a bit complicated as she further examines what she wants to get out of her education. While she enumerates and prioritizes her goals for her schooling, her other responses reveal several different sets of values. She says, for example,

> I am pursuing my education because 1) I need to have a college degree to get a well-paying job, 2) I like to learn about the things I'm supposed to

> know (that's why I like to read the classics), and 3) I think that one should never stop learning. I hope to open a doorway to a better life and a better me through pursuing my education.

Grace places the economic benefits of her schooling first in her list, and then adds the cultural literacy benefits of her studies. However, Grace's comments only refer to literacy's economic benefits only one other time. The rest of her remarks center on literacy's value as recreational and cultural enhancement.

Despite all this emphasis on cultural literacy, Grace's comments also demonstrate the toll a literacy-based knowledge culture extracts on college students trying to multitask:

> I would say my reading life right now is not quite as fulfilling as I would like it to be because I don't have a lot of time to read the things I want in my spare time. I love to read, and I always have. I love to read novels, particularly, but I'm open to learning to like new genres….I tend to read stuff for school right now, because I have a driving urge to always do what I'm supposed to do before I do what I want to do (That's a lot of "do's," sorry.) However, during the summer, and hopefully after school, I'll be able to spend more time reading the things that I love to read.

Grace's conscientious scheduling of doing what she is "supposed to do before [she does] what [she wants] to do" illustrates the demands that college students, even English majors, must negotiate in their literacy choices.

Siobhan, as well, grapples with the choices she must make each day. While writing plays a large role in Siobhan's life, reading must fight for equal time:

> I enjoy reading but find it difficult to find time to sit down and do it when I know that I could be doing more productive activities (work, people, etc.). I go through seasons with reading where I really enjoy it and others when I get a bad book and feel that have wasted a fair amount of time.

For Siobhan, reading is an activity that requires scheduling, and thus competes for priority with numerous other factors in her life. What is noteworthy about her comments is the idea of productivity. Because she is so busy, she must multi-task to the point that she reports finding ways to make her time profit her as efficiently as possible. Reading is a large time investment that had better pay off for her.

Erika is unusual in that she understands the economic value of literacy in unromantic terms. As she puts it, "I view writing and reading as essential, especially in today's society where it is such a major tool." Her practical approach to literacy can be seen throughout her comments, such as her insistence on written correctness and style as a critical calling card for obtaining employment. In addition she sees literacy, and in particular writing, as her stock in trade:

> Writing serves a broad purpose. I need it in school today. I have to write essays, reports, notes in class and e-mails. I would use it at work to write memo's e-mails, notices and possibly even newsletters. I know I will use reading and writing extensively in my life….I will need to be able to write well when applying for graduate school, when applying for a job.

Erika comes closest of all the students to articulating what Brandt calls "literacy as a means of production." As Brandt points out, "in an information economy, literacy shows up in all aspects of production: as raw material, as labor power, as an instrument of

production, and as product" (171). Erika, more than many of her colleagues, seems to understand the scope of literacy's influence in an information economy. With such a pragmatic view of literacy, it is not surprising that Erika does not see her reading as a consuming preoccupation:

> I don't have a big reading life….I don't go home everyday and read a book with my leisure time….I feel I don't have time, or that I would rather allocate my time to another resource (Sorry, I'm an economics major). I do have to say that my relationship with reading has changed immensely throughout my life. College is a big change in itself. One has to study more, read more to keep caught up in class and do well. I like to read, but it is extremely hard for me to read something that I am not interested in.

Erika's interests lie mostly in military history, both non-fiction and fiction. "Sappy love stories that are three hundred pages long" bore her. Her interest level is the single largest factor in completing a book. As she says, "I can't think of a book that I have read that I realy wasn't interested in or had planned to read." She will not buy a book she is not sure when she will read, even if it sparks some interest. However, the most interesting sentence in Erika's comment is that she "would rather allocate her time to another resource" than read in her leisure time. While she does not specify what other resource she would rather invest her time in, she seems to view recreational reading as a drain on time and energy that could be more fruitfully allotted. Erika most clearly expresses the stakes of how students choose to apportion their literacy resources while they are in college.

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One of the stimuli for beginning a project on college students' literacy was an interest in figuring out how much my creative writing students read, which, I thought, could not be enough. After doing a survey of their self-reported reading habits (my first foray into quantitative research) I realized that I was asking the wrong questions. The question was not *if* students read. As previous chapters have shown, they do read. They just may not be reading what we want them to. It is important to note that such choices do not imply a disregard for the texts we value and advocate in our classrooms. In fact, the students' responses indicate the opposite: they seem to value our opinions and seem genuinely to perceive the worth of the reading and writing we want them to do. However, they have other demands on their literacy that has often gone unexplored. Students' literacy choices are determined by a complex set of demands for their reflective and recreational energies. Most importantly, though, because the information economy that they are attending college to join asks a great deal of their literacy, the students feel compelled to make difficult choices with the time available for reading and writing.

# Chapter 5

## Writing as a Reader, Reading as a Writer: Disciplining Literacy in Creative Writing Classes

One of the most common refrains in the literature of teaching creative writing is the importance of enthusiastic literacy to the enterprise. Almost every chapter in Joseph Moxley's collection *Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy*, for example, makes reference to the reading/writing connection in the creative writing classroom, and many are dedicated solely to re-iterating that good writers are always good readers. David Jauss begins his essay, "Articles of Faith," by arguing that the best teachers are "the books of great writers" (63). Stephen Minot, in his essay "How a Writer Reads," takes up the call of his fellow contributors by exploring how to encourage students "to read as a writer" (90).

Philosophically, the roots of this belief go back at least to Hugh Blair, whose *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* devotes several lectures to examining the style of established and respected authors. As Linda Ferreira-Buckley explains,

> …much of *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* is devoted to an analysis of such contemporary writers as Joseph Addison, Jonathan Swift, and Shaftesbury as well as explanations of their vices and virtues. Blair instructed through example, as well as through precept. Together the

> two—his theory and practice—helped generations of schoolchildren to appreciate prose and poetry. (28)

Ferreira-Buckley's description of Blair's classroom bears a remarkable resemblance to current creative writing classrooms, in which exemplary texts are held up as models for study by students. Another tenet of many creative writing classrooms is the idea that the craft of writing (formal, technical attributes such as meter, enjambment, plot structures) can be taught, while the art of writing (the indefinable *esprit* that makes a work unique, original, and compelling) cannot. As Thomas Miller explains, Blair held a similar position: "Blair's whole approach…is based on his view that all that can be taught is how to correct, organize, and deliver what has been generated by natural genius" (237)

The contemporary creative writing classroom, not unlike many composition classrooms, seeks to persuade students that they are writers, even when they do not see themselves as such. When this tendency is coupled with Blairian belletrism, these classrooms become disciplining agencies. This chapter defines "discipline" as James Slevin has considered it. Slevin, in his essay "Disciplining Students: Whom Should Composition Teach and What Should They Know?", traces the etymology of the word, from its Latin connotation of learning or schooling, to the Renaissance meaning of discipleship, though military and religious associations, and finally to boundaries between different fields of knowledge and research. Thus, now, the word "discipline" constitutes two areas: "an area of study, defined by it content or methodology," and "a conversation among researchers" (158). When we teach, Slevin continues, we seek to help our students "participate in disciplinary conventions" (158).

Reading journals, in English classes in general and creative writing classes in particular, are a way to ease students into those very disciplinary conventions. In my Introduction to Creative Writing Course, the reading journals were assigned to accomplish several goals: they helped focus student reading by asking them to consciously look for craft issues in the texts, and they also encouraged students to examine how all their reading contributed to their creative writing.

A great deal of scholarship recommends the use of journals in coursework of various disciplines. As Julie Wollman-Bonilla has observed, scholars such as Toby Fulwiler, Nancie Atwell, Anne Berthoff, and many others

> …have shown that journals validate self-expression and personal response, encourage understanding, imagining, speculation, questioning, and shaping of ideas, and provide students with information relevant to their concerns and problems in the content of their own entries and their teacher's responses. (113)

Indeed, a perusal of Fulwiler's collection, *The Journal Book*, would indicate a dazzling array of uses and benefits of journals in classes across the curriculum. More recently, Jennifer Redmann discusses using reading journals in her foreign-language courses. Redmann notes that "[r]ather then treat reading as an isolated "skill," the journal requires that students engage with a text through reading, writing, and…speaking, thereby combing language learning with cultural content and critical thinking." The implications of Redmann's use of journals, though, are particularly interesting for this chapter: "…by creating a community of foreign language readers in their classrooms, instructors facilitate both students' comprehension of the target language community and their

eventual entry into it" (n.p.). As with the reading journals in my creative writing class, Redmann's assignment asks students to join into a discourse community, with its own set of rules, standards, and ways of communicating.

However, such an assignment assumes students' consent to teachers' efforts to initiate them into the discipline of creative writing, when students may not be interested in joining such a community. Shirley Brice Heath predicts that as the 21st century progresses, literacy educators will have to respond to students for whom "reading and writing around and about literature, for religious solace, or societal critique take place in response to felt needs." Therefore, educators must "enable writers to merge formal and informal writing across genres, audiences and institutional and personal contexts" (231). Heath's vision of current and future literacy education requirements holds particular import for this chapter, if we consider Heath's call for writing and reading teachers who

> …permit learners to make their own choices…forward for different kinds of advancement and achievement in a variety of types of institutions. *These efforts are not "purely" or even primarily academic,* but they are vocational, community-building, health-improving, and spirit-renewing (231).

The emphasis is mine, because many students in a creative writing class, particularly an introductory class, do not take the course to join the discipline. Some take it to fulfill a humanities requirement, but just as many take it for the alternative reasons that Heath suggests. Therefore, the motives of the students, why they take the class, limits the efficacy of an assignment designed to induct students into a discipline they may not want to join. In my Introduction to Creative Writing class, there were some students deeply

interested in disciplining themselves as writers. A larger number, however, took advantage of the class as a way to pursue what Heath describes a "felt needs," and they used their reading journals accordingly.

### Cultural Literacy in the Creative Writing Class

Some students, as their journals show, used the class as an extension of a humanistic education. That is, the creative writing class provided an opportunity to examine literature in a new way. However, they still examined the texts either cultural or artistic artifacts, objects of study on their own, rather than as models for their own writing or as launching pads for experimentation in the various genres covered. They employed this move for a variety of reasons, such as a perception of their own literary inexperience, a sense that literary analysis was "what they were supposed to do" in an English course, an overwhelming admiration for the achievement of an author, or a desire to luxuriate in what they feel literature does best—help readers connect to their world.

Haley was a soccer player, the only scholarship athlete in the class. She admitted in her final reflective letter to me that she was not very comfortable with the thought of taking a creative writing class. As she puts it,

> I personally am not much of a writer and sort of was dreading this class. But,…I ended up enjoying it. Coming into this class was not a very strong poem or creative writer. All the papers and journalism I have done is factual, term papers and stuff like that. Not really any free thought things….I was never really exposed to anything like this before.

Moreover, Haley felt unsure about literary interpretation. As she admits, "…I was not very outspoken in class I would just see what everyone else thought of the piece and

compare it to mine." Her discomfort with reading literature expressed itself in her reading journal with personal responses and constant questioning of her own thinking about the texts.

Haley's entry on "The Dead" shows the mixed reaction of a student who is gamely trying to acclimate herself to reading canonical works that are clearly a challenge to her. The length of the story proved to be a stumbling block for her, not only because of the challenge of reading it, but because the text confronted her definition of a short story. "What I did not like about how this was written," Haley says, "is that it is supposed to be a short story but it is so long." However, she perceptively notes the techniques Joyce uses to keep the reader interested:

> I would prefer it to be an actual short story, but I do think he did a decent job because he only used two conflicts. He uses a lot of symbolism to guide you through the story and most of it to me did not make sense until the end. Again this is what kept me interested in the story.

That level of interest is crucial for Haley, because, she says, "I have a hard time concentrating and staying focused when I read, especially longer stories…." This is not to say, though, that Haley did not have a personal reaction to the text. "Gabriel," she says, "and his role in the story intrigued me. He seemed to have a misunderstanding of women in general even about his wife." This reaction to the story and her observation that Joyce crafted the story to keep the audience reading illustrate the Haley's unwarranted insecurity from lack of practice reading complex texts. That her comment about Joyce's two conflicts and symbolism as interest generators seems off-hand shows how even novice readers can perceive narrative skill, if in the most basic of terms.

In the entry on "Sonny's Blues," though, Haley occupies herself with only one idea, that of the light and dark imagery in the story. As she suggests, "The image of light and dark is everywhere in this piece From setting the mood to talking about white and black, it gave you a sense of the mood and tone in the different parts of the story." However, the value of the story for Haley is more historical and sociological. For instance, she mentions that she liked the portrait the story drew for African Americans at that point in the nation's history: "It gives you a sense of the lifestyle back in the day and the struggles that blacks faced everyday. It is not a biography of one person's experience but how this environment and time affects a whole family which is what I really enjoyed." There is a certain sense of distance that Haley has placed between herself and the world created by the story. Because "Sonny's Blues" is about African Americans, Haley views the text, at least partially, apart from herself as a historical and social document.

However, much of Haley's journal shows a discomfort with ambiguity. For example, she wrote an entry for e.e. cummings' "i carry your heart with me" in which she expresses how much she enjoys reading love poetry and then, she says,

> …there were some questions I began to wonder about. Why is it the deepest secret that nobody knows? Is he married or is she married? Why is it such a secret? The line "and this is the wonder that's keeping the stars apart," shows that they cannot be together. I think he is referring to each other as the stars and they cannot be together. My biggest unanswered question is why? I do not know how to answer this or if it can be answered. He says at the beginning that he fears no fate, but she is his fate,

> so again he emphasizes that they cannot be together. Is she dead?...What does he mean I carry your heart? Obviously he is not literally carrying her heart, but this is an interesting way he uses to show he loves her.

Each question tumbles over the other, and many of them are wonderful starting points for an analysis of the poem. In this case, as Haley notes in her journal, she liked the poem because it leaves her "intrigued" but feeling like she has "no idea of what is going on."

The complexity of Louise Glück's poems, on the other hand, proves to be a tougher sell for Haley. Writing about the poem "Vespers," for example, she appreciates how Glück uses "such a simple thing as a tomato plant but mean something so much more." All the same, she takes umbrage at the spiritual uncertainty she perceives in the poem:

> It is almost as if she is questioning the sincerity of God, which I did not like. She is saying you put me here on earth to do these things and then do not provide me with adequate funds or whatever to fulfill those duties, but we on earth are the only ones that feel the pain and discouragement when things do not go right.

While her take on the poem has merit, her questions seem to undercut all her work. As she ends her entry, "The question I am left with is, is she really talking literally about tomato plants or is my interpretation right? What does she mean by you do not have a heart?" Although she previously established that the tomato plants were doing double duty thematically in the poem, Haley still ends her entry but second-guessing herself.

She explains her second guessing in another entry for Glück's poem "The Mirror":

> There is a certain point where writers can make their stories intriguing and bring up questions or where they can just make it completely confusing. In my opinion I feel that this is way too confusing and left way too many questions in my head after I was done reading….I do not interpret pieces very well, I have a hard time getting in deep with words so I did not like this one at all. I do not like feeling so confused after reading a piece.

The ellipses in the quotation mask some intriguing and observant questions that Haley asks about the poem. As we have already seen, Haley's questions are not silly ones, and are worthy of further examination. However, because she sees her inexperience as an inability to get "in deep with words" she does not give herself permission to delve into the text for answers.

Zoë's family was from Oklahoma, but because of her father's job she spent much of her childhood in France. She was friendly and talkative, but insisted on prefacing many of remarks with a comment about her inexperience. It was clear that while she enjoyed the class, she did not see herself as a potential member of a creative writing community. While her journal shows her facility with analyzing texts, her choice of entry topics seems to confirm her perspective. More than half of her entries are over texts that were not assigned for class. Some of them were creative works (mostly poems), but most of them were non-fiction works read on her own. All the same, Zoë approached the works for class with enthusiasm. In her entry for Mason's "Shiloh," for example, she considers the role of symbolism in the story:

> The thing that caught my attention was the emphasis put on the log cabin. The author made many references to it throughout the text. I think the log

> cabin symbolized their love. Leroy's desire to build a "real home" paralleled his desire to build a real relationship with Norma Jean but like the log cabin, their love would never be built. I was also stunned by the ending….I didn't expect Norma Jean to come out and say she was leaving Leroy. This left the reader feeling sorry for Leroy and confused about Norma Jean.

This excerpt is a curious mix of literary analysis and personal reaction. Zoë both notices the recurring motif of the log cabin and begins to investigate why Mason planted it so often. In addition, Zoë is taken with the story to the point that she also looks into the purely emotional response she had to the story's characters.

Sydney is perhaps the best example of the range of responses seen in the reading journals. As we will see, her entries extend to all points in the spectrum, from literary analysis, to formal considerations, to reading herself into the texts. She starts off, though, diligently looking at the readings as pieces for literary study. For example, as her early entries show, she sees value in the texts as exemplars of others' experience. For example, in her entry on Susan Glaspell's "Trifles," Sydney lights on how Glaspell used dialect in the play to add character (but does not elaborate) and how reading a play is a much different experience than watching one performed. Her main focus, though, is how Glaspell illustrates women's issues in American society:

> The gender roles played the biggest interest for me. The stereotype of "understanding" that a woman would never murder her husband, as well as her fellow wives willing to hide the evidence was brilliant. While the men tramp around the house searching for clues, the women discover bits

> of evidence—her baking, sewing, cleaning. Because the men virtually ignore the women's world—they remain blind to the truth before their eyes!

In addition to her attention to how the playwright portrayed the tensions between men's and women's epistemologies in her entry on Glaspell, Sydney also stresses the racial implications of James Baldwin's story "Sonny's Blues." She sees in the story a study in contrasting coping mechanisms to American racism:

> Baldwin's highlight of the two sides of the African American experience used the method of compare and contrast on a new level. While the narrator has made ever attempt to assimilate into white society—he still feels the pain of institutional racism. Conversely, Sonny—our main character is the complete opposite, & finds and outlet for his suffering through music. (Bebop & the Blues)→(developed by African Americans.) This story is rich in culture—along w/ the fact that it has biblical implications.

Sydney, perhaps not surprisingly, is enthusiastic about the ending of the story and its reference to "the [very] cup of trembling" from the book of Isaiah. She mentioned in her literacy narrative questionnaire that much of her literacy practice centers on her religious pursuits, and Baldwin's story would dovetail well between her reading for ENGL 2513 and her faith-based reading. However, what is striking about her entry is her insistence that the story is most valuable as a document for some sort of intercultural understanding. Her interest in examining how the two main characters deal with racism, and the words

she underlined—suffering, rich, and culture—reveal that her first reaction to the story was not as a well-crafted piece of fiction, but as a lesson well taught.

Sophia also tends to stay within a literary analysis paradigm in her journal. For example, she includes a fascinating entry on the websites for poets Ted Kooser and Joy Harjo. I had brought some Kooser poems on a whim as extra readings, and mentioned the work of Harjo off-handedly one day in class. Sophia took the supplemental reading to heart and did some research on these two authors. As she puts it, "I read their biographies and works posted online—I think it's helpful to read their bios to see where the writer is coming from and how it affects their writing." For Sophia, getting an idea of context, perhaps in the New Historical sense, makes a big difference in how she appreciates the writers' work:

> I can see the effect of their environments on both of their poems—It changes the subject matter, the mood, the feel, and even the style. Both have adapted their work to blend w/ their environments—It makes me think of Ansel Adams in the case of Kooser-refined, clear—Georgia O'Keefe for Harjo—up close—slightly out of focus—her work is really interesting—thanks for the tip—funny how you picked her for me to look at—like her I was born in OK—my mom is Cherokee, I moved to AZ—now here I am an English major—well, that's a career to shoot for!

I recommended Harjo because Sophia's autobiographical poems reminded me if Harjo's poem "Javelina" from the collection *In Mad Love and War*. Sophia picked up on the very similarities that I noticed. Like many of her colleagues, Sophia employs the technique of equating literary work with other creative genres. However, most other students felt more

comfortable comparing literary writing with music. Sophia instead compares the two poets' work to the visual arts—photography and painting. Also noteworthy is Sophia's idea that it is helpful for new writers to check out the biographies of established poets. In her entry, though, she seems to have a couple of different reasons for doing so. The first is as a way to better understand and analyze the writer's work ("to see where the writer is coming from and how it affects their writing"). Also, Sophia seems to find inspiration from Harjo's story—if someone like Harjo can find success as a writer, then Sophia herself has a chance as well.

Sophia incorporates the work of authors from her other classes as well. At the time of our class, she was taking a World Literature course, and she devotes several entries to works read in that class. She uses some of the entries as a means to further explore the explication of the literature. For example, in an entry on the story "The Treatment of Bibi Haldar" by Jhumpa Lahiri, Sophia begins by talking about the point of view—one of the best ways to start an analysis of the fictional craft in a piece of fiction. However, as she describes the story, her analysis moves into explanation:

> The narrator is "we" the first person plural—could be the housewives that live in the same apartment that Bibi lives in—There is also a "ghost " interpreter-who translates from Bengali to English—The author was born in London but raised in Rhode Island, her parents were from Bengal—she was raised speaking Bengali and English—The story was written in English—Bibi is the Hindi term of affection for a wife—the irony is that Bibi will never be married because she has a seizure disorder and the townspeople believe she is damaged goods.

Instead of discussing the effect of using a first person point of view in a piece of fiction, Sophia devotes her journal entry into exploring the issues raised in the story, such as the role languages play in the story and the cultural exploration how a woman with a seizure disorder is dealt with in Bengali-American community. Similarly, her entry on Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* concentrated on Achebe's themes of colonial occupation and assimilation. As Sophia mentions in her last entry, "I like that the stories I've been reading in World Lit show so many different writing styles, POVs, cultures—I like the idea of using my writing to expose readers to my life experiences and culture." Like many other students, Sophia sees much value in writing's ability to create connections between people and communities that seem very different. She does, though, see herself as a potential part of that literary discussion.

A glance through Isabella's journal would reveal a riotous survey of the reading choices bookstores provide—from Austen and Chaucer to popular novelists like Philippa Gregory and J.K. Rowling. Her entries are interesting in that some do feature Isabella studying the texts for craft ideas, but the majority express enjoyment and pleasure; that is, her journal only marginally operates in the spirit of the assignment, and instead portrays a reader far more interested in admiring the art, rather than the craft, of the writer. Isabella's journal reflects the different ways she approaches and consumes texts from different authors. Her respect for many of them, though, affects how she writes about the reading; in other words, Isabella's admiration for the art of writing changes how she reads certain texts. Her entries become less specific and reflect a less-studious, more enthusiastic reader. For these works, she ceases to be a creative writing student and becomes instead a reader immersed in the pleasure of the experience and a celebrant in

the mysteries of literary talent. For example, her entry on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* reveals her unobstructed enjoyment:

> I can't get over her sense of humor. She is so dry and sarcastic but with such wit, I can imagine a gleam in her eye even as I am reading and I feel a though we are comrades. She creates such hilarious and sympathetic characters—I wish I could be Elizabeth Bennett, and of course every woman wants to marry a Mr. Darcy. It is both astounding and wonderful that something written so long ago is still so touching and relevant today. Jane Austen is truly a genius—I wish I had half her skill…

As we will see later, Isabella does not hesitate to delve into the very sentences of certain authors, and those texts become models for her own experimentation. Austen, however, is not one of those authors. Isabella focuses instead on Austen's wit, her "hilarious and sympathetic characters," and how her work remains "touching and relevant." When faced with a writer like Austen, Isabella abandons looking for how the author achieves such effects, and revels in her delight that Austen did so.

While the majority of Lily's entries were about the assigned pieces, she also brought in several other works that she was reading on her own. She seems to be a voracious reader; her reading outside the texts assigned for class included Tom Wolfe, Bob Dylan, and Allen Ginsberg. In fact, she requested that we amend the syllabus to include an Allen Ginsberg poem, "America," in our class discussion. I gladly altered the syllabus, because I wanted to encourage enthusiasm for independent and active reading. Also, I thought that if one student were excited about the poem, others would be too. I was correct. For the most part, the students responded favorably to the poem, except that

in “America” Ginsberg builds in a number of historical references that the students were not familiar with. In her journal, Lily writes of the poem,

> It is beyond amazing. I love his language. I love his meter. I love his approach. I love his content. AMAZING! There is nothing I don’t like. Everything is relatively understandable in context. “It occurs to me that I am America. I’m talking to myself again.” What a wonderful line! What an important statement! I want to learn from his flow of thought and mostly his honesty. He puts things pretty frankly. I asked Michael to assign this piece because I think it is an important and thought provoking piece of literature. Ginsberg is amazing.

Lily’s enthusiasm in this entry is a little heightened from her normal tone in the journal, but only by a small margin. Most of her entries show this level of zeal. We can tell that Lily thinks Ginsberg is “amazing,” but her entry suggests that he is amazing for his “honesty.” Lily seems to value honesty and frankness, which suggests an alert reader, suspicious of sophistry, always digging for meaning. Further adding to this portrait of Lily as a discerning reader is that she requested the piece because she found it “thought provoking.”

Grace, like many of her colleagues, began her journal in the mode of literary study. Her first entry, for instance, on some of Ai’s poems, regards the pieces as cultural snapshots:

> I liked that these poems were able to give readers a very good example of how a very religious Hispanic woman might respond to her son on his wedding day, how a woman might feel about her husband after a long

> marriage, and how a black person might feel based on the Riot Acts. I think these poems also offered interesting topics such as domestic violence, oppression of women, and racism for discussion.

Grace, like many of her colleagues, initially approaches the pieces as a dutiful English major would, looking for why a piece would be so canonical that it would be included on a syllabus for a college English course. Grace responds by considering what they have to offer a mainstream (white, educated, upper-middle-class) audience.

Colin was perhaps the most consistent in his writing about writing in the reading journal. However, he still occasionally devoted an entire entry to a mostly literary discussion. In his entry on the story "Patriotism" by Yukio Mishima that he read for a literature class, for example, Colin discusses the story entirely in literary terms; that is, he examines the story for "examples of certain Japanese concepts and the idea of how gender roles are changing in Japan."

Colin focuses on Shinji's choice of his wife as witness to his *seppuku*, or suicide, and how Mishima used it to demonstrate the changes Japanese culture underwent in response to relations with Western countries:

> By using traditional ideas, Mishima is able to effectively communicate to the reader that while traditions are still in place, many changes in culture are occurring….I enjoyed this piece because of everything that could be read into it. We were assigned the piece [in the literature class] so the class could grasp an understanding of traditional Japanese ideals as well as what influence the Western world was having on the East. This piece showed me how writing can tell the story of a nation though simple characters. I

> enjoyed the story because it not only dealt with love, but also many of the political and cultural changes going on in Japan at the time.

The main appeal for the story, as Colin suggests, is the value of the story as a cultural document to give the reader an idea of Japan and its culture at a specific time in its history. Perhaps the only trace of Colin's eye for learning about writing comes in his sentence about "how writing can tell the story of a nation through simple characters." For the most part, though, this entry approaches the story from an interpretive paradigm, rather than a belletristic one.

### Examinations of Form

Colin's entry on "Patriotism," though, was the exception, rather than the rule. Most of his journal reveals a reader intently interested in seeing how the writers accomplished what they did. For example, he was taken by Louise Glück's poem "Parable of Flight" and spent the majority of the entry examining how Glück achieved the effect of fading or fleeting love through the image of the flock of birds:

> I liked how she used the comparison between a flock of birds and an emotion. It allowed an abstract feeling to become more real to me. I also enjoyed how she jumped around from talking about the bird to talking about people. It helped keep the image of fleeing love alive. If she had made the image of the birds in the first stanza and then never touched on them again, the poem would have lost much of its significance. The poem showed me just another way imagery could be used to give a visual image of love.

Colin seems to have clued into a formal feature of Glück's poem, in which she sets up an image, then sets up a context, and dovetails one into the other for added significance, as he notes. He also observes how deliberately Glück structures the poem for that very effect, and extrapolates how a clumsier writer could mess up the rich image of the birds by not capitalizing on its metaphorical possibilities.

Colin is equally impressed with the perceived intentional choices of Allen Ginsberg's "America." As Colin puts it,

> [t]he poem, at the surface, looks like nothing more than a rant with allusions to different historical events, something someone who was not in their right mind would do. As you dig deeper, you realize that everything is done on purpose to create a certain image. While to some this may seem like a poem written by someone who is out of their mind, I believe Ginsberg was very intentional in his allusions and word choices.

The impact of those intentional choices on Colin comes from challenging his definitions of what poetry is supposed to do, what it looks like, and how it is put together. Ginsberg's poem does not fit into stereotypes of daydream-like musings that Colin associates with poetry:

> I thought this poem was amazing. It showed me that not all poetry has to be abstract to get a point across. Ginsberg creates very real images ad feelings in his poem by using events that really happened, not events in some fantasy world. He gets right in the reader's face and tells it like he sees it. There is no fluff, no bullshit….He didn't have to beat around the bush to get his point across.

For Colin, there seems to be a real appeal in the rhetorical capacity of Ginsberg's poetry. Ginsberg, as Colin argues, "gets right in the reader's face" and "didn't have to beat around the bush to get his point across." Colin seems to find a freedom in forms of poetry that depart from the Romantic tradition or fit popular images of nineteenth-century poets.

The greater part of Colin's admiration, though, seems to go to Henry James. Colin's entry on the story "The Jolly Corner" details his fascination with how James crafted what seems to be a ghost story, but is in reality a psychologically complex tale of the present they are living in versus what-could-have-been: "I was unaware of whether or not there was a real ghost in the house until all the clues were tied together in the end. Henry James was able to create a tale that explores the individual and the choices we make in life." Colin indicates that he "was impressed with how James was able to create a dual character out of one man." While Colin appreciates the lesson of how our choices determine who we are, he finishes his entry with a discussion of a more specific lesson on fictional craft:

> From this story I was able to learn how to hide the identity of a character better. James doesn't come out and say who the ghost is at the end, leaving it up to the reader to try and figure it out from clues that he left. This story allowed me to see that more than one character can come from a single individual if the writer is able to effectively conceal the character's alter-identity.

Colin suggests that James provided a valuable model for a number of fictional techniques, such as foreshadowing and taking a psychological concept and turning into a more tangible form. Colin's entry is one of the best examples of how a student can learn

deeply specific lessons from belletristic reading; that is, belletrism not only contributes to vocabulary building and usage modeling, but certain structural lessons as well.

Grace, by her entry on "The Dead," has moved firmly into craft-oriented discussions. For example, she says of Joyce's story, "I liked how Joyce used Gabriel's point of view to describe all the females in his life. I also liked how Joyce used actions and dialogue to describe his characters in addition to simple narrative descriptions of thoughts and history." Grace has moved very quickly to looking at the choices Joyce made as he crafted his story—choices such as point of view and finding ways to dramatize internal emotion.

After her first, largely criticism-based, entry on Ai's poetry, Grace, in her entry on "The Dead," quickly figured out what kind of analysis the reading journal asked for. Her entries are short, terse, and follow the format of the journal faithfully. As such, they do not offer much in terms of detail, but they do show a student writer how has learned quickly what to look for when she reads for a creative writing class. Her most illuminating answers come from the questions in which she considers what she liked or did not like about the pieces, and what she can learn from reading them. A perspicacious answer for the last question, for instance, comes from her entry on "Trifles": "I think I can learn about how to tell the story of other people without that character even being present, and still give a good version of the story." Another set of telling answers comes from the question of why I would assign each text. For example, when considering this question in the context of the play "That Midnight Rodeo" by Mary Sue Price, Grace writes, "I think that Michael assigned this piece so that we can learn how to set up a

tension in a piece through small argument about minor things and link those small arguments into one giant argument. (Funny how things work out sometimes, huh?)"

By the end of the semester, Grace's entries reach the height of their perceptiveness. For example, as she examines Hopkins' "The Windhover," she finds,

> I really liked how Hopkins used alliteration to make his readers slow down and pay attention to each word. I also liked how he used words and sounds that fit in with the image that he is trying to portray. For example,…Hopkins allows the poem to flow when he is talking about the flight of the bird, but when he says "off, off forth on swing," the sounds he uses to bring to mind the actual flapping of a bird's wings. He continually uses such sounds to make his readers envision what he is writing about.

As we have seen, it did not take Grace long to understand what the reading journal asked for, and adapt accordingly. Many of her colleagues did not acculturate as quickly as Grace, and some did not at all.

Zoë also shifts her emphasis to that of formal considerations, but her wide choice of texts shows that she is thinking of her development as a writer in multiple ways. While she does look at how the poets, fiction writers, and playwrights accomplish their craft, she also reads to see how non-fiction writers fashion successful work. For an example of how Zoë reads a piece of fiction, consider how she examines Mason's technical expertise with flashbacks in "Shiloh":

> One thing this story taught me was how to incorporate flashbacks. It is important to know how to use them so that you don't lose the reader and

> this story did a good job. It gave enough detail so that the reader understood what was going on the whole time.

Not many students wrote or talked about flashbacks in class, and thus it is notable that of all the technical features for Zoë to zero in on, she chose a crucial fictional element. It seems she absorbed quite a bit about narrative early in the semester.

Another good example of Zoë's growing awareness of authorial technique occurs in her entry for Price's "That Midnight Rodeo." Zoë was fascinated by how Price took a divisive issue like abortion and steered clear of engendering contentious debate. Zoë was, in fact, amazed that class discussion of the play did not devolve into a heated discussion on the subject matter. She spends a large portion of her entry on how Price pulls that off. As she puts it,

> One thing that struck me was how Price was able to make a controversial issue into a story about a couple. The play avoided the controversy of abortion and told a story….Perhaps the end is what allows the play to avoid controversy. The end was also striking. The problem was never resolved. The author leaves the audience to decide what Cindy does and that way there is no controversy.

Zoë is also impressed by not only the simplicity of the story, but how its economy seems to avoid many of the clichés she associates with texts about couples:

> I liked that this play only had two characters. Many times a play that tells the story of two lovers is overrun with parents and in-laws. By only having the two characters the author was able to show that their relationship was strictly about them when many times that is not the case. One thing I

> didn't like was how you didn't know why she was going to the doctor. By not knowing I was forced to read it again and many times in a stage performance the audience does not get to see it again.

"That Midnight Rodeo" is a play with a run time of only about ten minutes. It is available in one of many anthologies of ten-minute plays. I chose a few of these plays to ease students into writing plays, an unfamiliar genre for many creative writing students. These plays are also a great way for students to write a play that has a better shot at being produced, as there are entire festivals organized around this dramatic form. At any rate, the economy that Zoë writes about testifies to the limitations of the genre as well as Price's dramatic ability and avoidance of what she perceives as truisms in narratives about lovers. Also noteworthy is her concern that audiences might not catch the subtleties that the play has woven into its conflict.

One particularly interesting entry comes from the unlikely source of e-mail. Zoë received an e-mail message that included a copy of e.e. cummings' "I like my body when it is with your." The message did not include the title of the poem, and Zoë indicates that she is not sure of the line breaks in her version are correct. However, she was so taken with the poem that she wrote a journal entry over it. Of the many things she liked about the poem, Zoë says, was that she

> …liked the use of adjectives in the poem. The author used adjectives that could be thought of as opposites but weren't exactly. For example "firm-smooth" are not words normally associated with each other but do not contradict each other. I wish I knew the line breaks because if it truly is

> broken up this way I don't like how he carries over thoughts into the next line. I like lines to be one complete thought.

Zoë's literary skepticism in this entry is admirable. She considers whether the version she was sent is correct, because she has perceived that a corrupt rendering would skew her interpretation. Also interesting is how her poetic aesthetics are in many ways already set, in that she likes lines "to be one complete thought." She also notes that

> One thing a writer can learn from this work is the use of unusual words. Some examples are "I like it hows" and "eyes big love-crumbs." The author uses the English language a bit out of the ordinary without it sounding strange. This type of wording makes the poem interesting to read.

What is most interesting about her entry on cummings is not her admiration of how he writes, but that someone shared the poem through the medium of e-mail. Someone she knew realized that she would like the poem and forwarded it to her. This is a fascinating example of literacy sponsorship, on one hand, and an equally intriguing transfer of cultural literacy through a new electronic medium, on the other.

However, what makes Zoë's journal most noteworthy is the ratio of outside texts to texts assigned for class. The majority of Zoë's entries are over works read on her own. Most of them are non-fiction, but she still reads them for what she can learn or use in her own writing. For example, in her entry on David W. Shoemaker's "'Dirty Words' and the Offense Principle," she looks at the genre of the scholarly article:

> This is an analysis of another author's theory on offensiveness and therefore I would classify it as a scholarly work. This type of literature is

> helpful to read because it teaches me a different type of structure than fiction. The piece is in more of an essay format and does not have a plot line that is found in fiction.

Zoë seems to perceive that while she enjoys writing creative works, she will probably need to write in many other genres, and that learning how to write in those genres is just as important as in a creative mode. Another example of how she examines non-fiction genres is in her entry on the American Civil Liberties Union report *Freedom Under Fire: Dissent Post 9/11*:

> This is a report and helpful to read because it shows a good example of what is too much information and what is too little. It also shows me how to write something that people with less education can read and understand but keep it interesting for people with more education.

Zoë also sees the report as an important lesson for how she engages in social and political discourse:

> The thing that stuck out to me in this work was the author's statements on the present favorable outlook on control during distress and how it is later viewed as unconstitutional. The dissenters of government action during war time are the ones who are later praised as defenders of democracy. This stuck out to me because in high school [in France] I was surrounded by dissenters of the US government and it was easy to voice my views. Now that I live in a very Republican state and am surrounded by supporters I tend to keep my mouth shut. This report encouraged me to speak up a little.

The ACLU text clearly has made an impact on Zoë, and it is noteworthy that she has thus included the report in her reading journal. She seems to indicate that not only are various works in multiple genres crucial to one's writing in general, but that literacy serves multiple purposes, and that no one purpose is more noble or valuable than any other.

Many of Lily's entries reveal that she is a reader with a heightened awareness of the sound of language, and this interest guides many of her explorations of how the writers achieved many of their best literary effects. Because she is an amateur musician, and her artistic consumption is predominantly musical, this is not a surprise. For example, her interest in the sound of language appears in her entry on Joyce's "The Dead":

> The last three paragraphs are truly wonderful. He drew in alliteration and chiasmus (falling faintly and faintly falling…) I think I could learn a lot from his word choice and syntax. Also, he uses really interesting light images. I think this short story is an excellent example of typical structure (in terms of climax and such) and it is also beautiful example of word choice.

Lily was the only student in the class who knew what "chiasmus" was. The closing paragraphs of "The Dead" is fertile ground for a student with such a skilled ear, and her entry shows that even early in the semester, she has a firm grasp on what she is supposed to be looking for—word choice, syntax, imagery, and structure.

Another writer that would appeal to a musician is Louise Glück, whose poems also warranted a good number of exclamation points and underlined words. Indeed, Lily's opening to her entry reads, "Ahhh! This woman is wonderful!" However, what

fascinated Lily about Glück was not necessarily her lyricism, but her (in Lily's terms) purposeful ambiguity:

> There are so many things to be interpreted→so stimulating. My favorites were "The Mirror" and "Vespers." I think they are most satisfying because they had awesome metaphors for me to think about. There is so much to be learned in terms of the cornucopia of ways to tell one's story or describe one thing→maybe in Glück's case she is describing something universal, but doing so in such an unpredictable way. I love it. Michael might have wanted us to read this for the usage of line breaks, but I also for the wonderful ambiguity and metaphors. This re-emphasizes that as an artist, one must make a choice… Glück can choose to be ambiguous as long as she gives the ambiguity a purpose.

As suggested by her entry on Ginsberg, Lily favors work that requires her to think, or as she puts it, she likes "things to be interpreted." Her zest for ambiguity reflects a fascination with multivariate meaning, with language that provokes a variety of possible explications. Thus, the last sentence of her entry becomes the briefest of *künstlerromans*, with a lesson for her from Glück about the value and responsibility of polysemy, which Lily seems to enjoy for its own sake, but has also come to realize needs to serve an artist's purpose.

Lily also incorporated her own reading into the journal, and often it too reflected her interest in music. One of the entries is over Bob Dylan's *Chronicles I.* While she insists she read it because of her interest in the singer-songwriter, she also finds something to learn from as a writer:

> It is certainly not a serious read, but Bob Dylan has had an amazing life and has some amazing things to say about it. He writes very honestly. He is not just telling a story, he is reliving it. It feels like he is saying, "OK, sit down, here we go…" He doesn't do anything to romanticize his experiences, they stand well on their own. I would think you could learn a lot in terms of good story telling and use of dialogue. My personal reaction is to think, damn, that's how you do it? It is inspiring and discouraging at the same time.

That she does not consider the book "a serious read" indicates that Lily holds very traditional standards of serious literature. All the same, we see again that she values honesty. Honesty, for Lily, involves refusing to "romanticize…experiences," which illuminates much of her values for what she terms honesty.

As we have seen, Lily is one of the most enthusiastic readers in the class. Remember that she was not an English major, and yet was one of the most prolific and discriminating readers in the class. While she did not feel that the reading journal played much of a role in her appreciation of the literature, her journal shows, all the same, a student who devoured the texts on a number of levels. She is also a student who whole-heartedly embraces the belletristic aims of a creative writing class that incorporates a great deal of reading into the curriculum. Her resistance to the reading journal comes less from the belletristic foundation, and more from how it was expressed in the reading journal assignment.

The entries in which Isabella looks at texts for the nuts-and-bolts craft of writing tend to be on more contemporary, popular authors. For instance, her first entry is *The*

*Fuck Up* by Arthur Nersesian. Isabella is fascinated with the novel about New York told in the point of view of an apathetic narrator. She characterizes the prose as "blunt," "easy to follow," and "at times, crass." However, she also notes that

> The language only changes during the times when he is encountering small but significant revelations regarding himself, or life in general. At those times the wording becomes intellectually heightened, more complicated; both the author's and the character's education become evident. This is helpful for me, as my main challenge when writing things of my own has been the desire to make things too complicated and wordy, when the real goal is to make the reader think.

Isabella makes an interesting and complex distinction between conciseness in prose and "making the reader think," as if the two were mutually exclusive of each other. Also noteworthy is how she values the "heightened" language the author uses, which makes the writer's education more evident. These ideas work together, I would suggest, in that Isabella seems to be searching in her reading for a larger vocabulary, for more and more words for her to use one her own.

We see a similar idea in her entry on Philippa Gregory's *The Favored Child*. Isabella has "loved…all" of Gregory's books because they are "very, very descriptive," appealing to "every one of the senses." Isabella seems eager to imitate this style of writing:

> It is sentences like, "I felt gutted of love, of life, of tenderness. I felt clean and simple. I was as clean and cold as a freezing stream or like a chalk rock face with a sheen of ice on it" that draw the reader in so deeply and

> evoke passion, desperation, and even mute impotent fury. It astounds me and I long to be able to write so evocatively, so sensually. Basically, her writing style challenges me not only to describe things more sharply, but also to look at things in a different way; to use language that is beautiful without being cliché. That, I think, is one of the hardest things to do, since every word can change the meaning of a piece.

As we have seen, Isabella's study of texts she consciously examines as writing models tends to be microscopic, sentence-level, focusing on each word choice. She values the power of sensual description, but description that remains original. However, one of the crucial phrases in this excerpt is that she would like "to look at things in a different way." This longing points to the other salient feature of Isabella's journal, the admiration for the art of writing, the aspect that cannot be taught, the ineffable talent for looking at things in ways that other people do not and writing it down.

Sophia, while usually more interested in literary analysis, does devote some space in her journal to focusing more on the techniques of the writers. For example, her entry on the story "Patriotism" by Mishima looks at how imagery and point of view work to make the story "realistic": "One thing I could learn from this piece is the use of imagery. I also liked the way his story took place in the thought if the characters and the 3rd-person narrator. There was very little dialogue." Sophia also mentions that through sensual details, "I felt like I was witnessing the actions." Her entry seems less a literary interpretation and more an admiration of Mishima's writing. In addition, Sophia mentions that the class and the journal have changed how she has read Joyce's "The Dead":

> I've read "The Dead" before—I read it for Brit Lit and loved it! I really feel like I got something more from it this time because I made a point of looking at the writing, not just the story….His lines are so ripe and full of meaning and emotion….It feels like he didn't leave a single word to chance—every single word was chosen carefully after much thought. It's really amazing the way his words feel in the tongue when read aloud—so sumptuous!

That Sophia looked "at the writing, not just the story" this time around shows that she understands what creative writing teachers want their students to look for—in this case, in Sophia's terms, the lines "full of meaning and emotion," words "chosen carefully after much thought, and language that is a sensual experience in itself, a "sumptuous" "feel on the tongue when read aloud."

Sydney is a good example of a student whose reading journal shows a progression from neophyte in creative writing to a student beginning to read more for craft issues. Her early journal entries record her responses to reading the texts, as well as examining the texts for a sense of what she can learn from the pieces. In some instances, she is looking at how the pieces can help readers learn about other cultures or minority groups. Her first entry is over James Joyce's "The Dead." It is a fairly conventional response piece, detailing what it was like to read the story:

> I must admit, this was a tougher read for me. I had to go back quite a few times to grasp on a lot of things. Set in Ireland, we meet Gabriel Conroy—on a night he and his wife attend a party thrown by his two aunts. Joyce's

> style is detail, detail, detail. Everything was visualized to such a point of reality.

In her last two sentences, we see a hint of future entries, in which Sydney starts to concentrate more on the authors' craft—how they write what they write. Yet, for the most part, she remains in the safe territory of experience ("this was a tougher read for me") and brief plot synopsis. However, her comment about "detail, detail, detail" and Joyce visualizing everything "to the point of reality" shows a perceptiveness confirmed in a note apparently written during a discussion in class, which defined realist fiction as having lots of detail.

By the time she gets to writing about Bobbie Ann Mason's "Shiloh," though, Sydney is far more comfortable talking about the story in technical terms. This is not to say that she has totally abandoned discussing immediate reactions. She mentions, for instance, "I personally have family who has led lives similar to those of Leroy and Norma Jean." However, Sydney devotes the majority of her entry to how Mason paints her portrait of "rural, working-class Southerners." For instance, Sydney notes that

> [t]his story teaches us the importance/role of point of view. Leroy is a pot-smoking ex-truck driver. But we love him, and feel sorry for him as he is deserted by his wife. Why? Because the story is told by a third-person, limited point of view. Therefore, we hear only what Leroy hears, see what he sees, etc.

By exploring how Mason uses point of view as a factor in the effectiveness of the story, Sydney achieves a form of analysis that the reading journal is designed for—a way to examine literary texts for the craft elements that make them successful. Sydney's journal

shows a progression from the kind of entries valued more highly in a literature class (personal reaction to a text, looking at texts as cultural documents) to looking at texts as constructed with particular choices in mind for desired effects.

Erika likewise devotes some of her entries to looking into how the authors write their texts. Interestingly, though, those entries which explore the authors' craft were written after the class periods in which we discussed the works. Like many of her colleagues, Erika got the most out of the class discussions of assigned texts. For example, she appreciated small group work when the class discussed "The Windhover: To Christ Our Lord," by Gerard Manley Hopkins. As Erika puts it, "I never really liked 'old english' works….I have a hard time finding what it really means, the english is hard to understand for me, and it just throws me off and confuses me." Once the small groups had a chance to examine the poems and compare their thoughts with the large group, though, Erika "finally figured out what the piece is really trying to convey," and she "began to appreciate [the] poem much more." Moreover, Erika says, "I also really enjoyed listening to some of the words in this poem aloud and the sounds they make. It really adds to the beauty of this piece."

The class discussions also contributed to Erika's appreciation of Louise Erdrich's short story "A Wedge of Shade." For instance, she was impressed with how Erdrich used the weather as a way to establish the tone of the story: "I really loved how well Louise describes the weather. It is almost like you are there in the story." Furthermore, Erika noted Erdrich's use of multiple elements to achieve a variety of effects:

> It was so awesome how Louise Erdrich used light, dark, shade, sun, hot, and cool contrasts to really add to this story. I believe that is what made

> this piece so good, the many contrasts she used in touch, feel, weather, and the way things look (far off or close)….She also does a very well job in slightly describing each character just enough where you can picture someone you know as that character.

Erika astutely points out the contemporary fictional technique of erring on the side of economy in exposition, but she also brings back the idea of creating parallels with the reader's life. Erdrich's knack of "describing each character just enough" to construct a picture of "someone you know as that character" appeals to Erika's fascination with relating literature as directly as possible back to her own life. As we will see later, Erika writes a great deal in her journal about her own personal reactions to the texts; however, as this entry shows, she is capable of analyzing a text objectively as well.

Blaine easily masters the intent of the reading journal, but he also diverts his reading toward his own reading passions near the end of the semester. He does, though, occasionally occupy himself with difficult interpretive issues. For example, in his entry on "Trifles," Blaine, like many of his colleagues, concentrates on the aspect of gender issues that Glaspell illuminates:

> I enjoyed the role of gender in this story—it's funny how they are going all over the place looking for evidence and the women find out the whole story by just chillin' in the kitchen. The only thing I didn't like was how complex the evidence was. It wasn't until we read it again in class that I finally understood everything about it…. [I]t is written in a unique way that shows multiple conflicts. There is the conflict of the woman killing

> her husband and then the conflict of the two women on whether or not to give up the evidence to convict the wife.

While Blaine begins by first considering the gender issues that fascinate most readers, he winds up thinking about the layers of conflicts Glaspell builds into her play. An even better example of how quickly Blaine adapted to mining texts for technical aspects, though, is his first entry, on "The Dead." While it seems to take Blaine a while to find his place in the story, he still manages to find something of worth in the piece:

> I enjoyed the build up of emotion between the main characters and then the resolution between the two. I didn't enjoy how slow the story was taking off. I thought it took much too long to reach a point of serious interest and found the beginning a little boring and hard to stay focused. I learned about how a story with an emotional internal conflict can be just as exciting and interesting as a story with external conflict.

The main triumph of this entry for a creative writing teacher is Blaine's realization that "emotional internal conflict can be as exciting and interesting as a story with external conflict." As the two above passages point out, Blaine has a talent for appreciating the dramatic elements of short fiction, and his developing a taste for "internal conflict" bodes well for future work in creative writing if he so chooses.

### Reading and Writing the Self into the Reading Journals

Many of the students felt comfortable enough in the journal assignment to chronicle how they grappled with the personal issues they encountered as they read throughout the semester. For many of these students, literature was only marginally an academic endeavor; perhaps more importantly, the texts the students read served as

touchstones into issues they happened to be grappling with at that time. Thus, the texts served purposes more like what Shirley Brice Heath describes as "community-building, health-improving, and spirit-renewing" (231). In other words, for many students reading the texts had less to do with joining a literate community of writers, and more to do with helping them grapple with their worlds.

Justin, a psychology major who, as we'll see later, contemplated changing his major to English, was also in ROTC and was working to be admitted into the Navy SEALS. In addition, he was one of the most dedicated and enthusiastic members of the class. At one point in the semester, he sent me an e-mail indicating his displeasure at certain members of the class who did not seem to be participating to the level he thought appropriate. Because he was enjoying the class, it dismayed him that others might not share his enthusiasm. That enthusiasm is evident throughout his reading journal.

Justin, like a select few classmates, wrote about his outside reading, rather than assigned reading. His journal reveals a reader who devours texts, and a reader for whom texts serve very important purposes. He incorporates texts, in that he makes them part of him; moreover, he searches through a text to find parts to latch on to, and from those common points of reference, proceeds to digest them for meaning of personal significance.

For example, he devotes the first few entries to discussing Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. His journal did not follow the recommended format, but instead reflected a student working diligently and eagerly through pieces. He initially describes *East of Eden* as

> …what every work of literature, fiction or non, should be—a story. It is the overview of two families from a highly detailed perspective, and this

> fulfills the most shallow of commitments an author ca make to an audience. And then there is the story within the story, the underlying layer at work. We label this portion the theme(s) or in most aspects, the original intent of the author. Steinbeck is a genius with East of Eden, because the depth of the themes presented are only limited by the depth of the audience.

Justin's comments sound a bit like the beginning of a dry lecture in an American Literature survey, but he soon becomes preoccupied with those themes that he mentions, and from then on uses both the novel and the reading journal to ponder the implications of the issues Steinbeck raises. For example, a few sentences later Justin contemplates the universality of the Cain and Abel story Steinbeck creates:

> I find it interesting how such ideas and themes still apply today, and how they simply play out without much notice. And I think about all of this and through consideration come to this question: Are we simply meant to play out the sins of our fathers, forced by the hand of fate? What part does a name play into our own growth as a person, and are we slaves to the unspoken legacy that it carries with it?...Damn you Steinbeck for asking me questions I can't answer.

Throughout the rest of Justin's entries on *East of Eden*, he works through the ideas that the novel has presented him. In addition to working out these issues philosophically, he ultimately works to situate himself into the meaning he finds in the text.

He gives a contemplative title ("Timshel…") to his next entry on Steinbeck. He finds a provisional answer to the questions from his previous entry:

> All during this time [I've been reading] I keep running the questions though my head over and over, a tape on a loop in my mind, which led me to this conclusion. We are who we make ourselves. Despite the situation, the story behind our existence, we have a choice. Regardless of what ghosts may haunt our family history, we are under the control of our own will, slaves to our decisions alone.

Later, Justin ponders the significance of the term that started the entry off in the first place:

> Timshel.
>
> Steinbeck kept coming back to this through the entire novel. Its Hebrew for "Thou mayest," an overwhelmingly empowering statement that speaks of the choice I mentioned. We may do whatever we want, with our only shackle being ourselves. Our inadequacies (sp?) are defined only by the strength of our will and ability to follow it.

Despite this optimistic interpretation of the theme free will, by his last entry, Justin has revised his thinking and admits the darker ramifications of Steinbeck's ideas. While his more complex thoughts are in themselves noteworthy, what is more interesting is how Justin ends up placing himself at the center of all his thinking:

> Timshel. Thou mayest. We always have a choice.
>
> But what are we most likely to do with that choice?...what does [Steinbeck] think of free will? I think…he was a cynic desperately wanting to see the silver linings. And I think I'm the same way, a pessimist desperately wishing to find my optimism. I still don't know what

> to think of his critique of free will, if that's what it even is. Did Cal ever really have a choice, or was he doomed from the word go? And do you know what scares the hell out of me? The fact that I can see myself in him, that I can see my eyes when I look into his. I am the villain frantically wanting to be the hero of the story. I am Caleb Trask, looking for validation and redemption in the eyes of my father. How sad is that. Damn you Steinbeck for being so good at what you do.

Justin not only works to locate himself intellectually in relation to Steinbeck and his idea of free will, but also emotionally in relation to Caleb Trask in the novel. As we have seen, Justin uses his literacy (at least with *East of Eden*) as a means to grapple with issues already somewhere in his consciousness. He does not really read the novel to examine how Steinbeck achieved the ends that Justin admires so much. For the most part, Justin reads the work he writes about for reasons other than considering the craft. His literacy fits more closely with the literacy that Heath suggests as a new avenue of reading and writing instruction, which emphasizes literacy for personal and spiritual growth.

This is not to say, however, that Justin does not perceive or appreciate the craft of a novel. He mentions briefly, for instance, that in John Fowles' *The Collector,* Fowles' "use of plot, and more important, dialogue, are beautiful and poetic." However, Justin strives predominantly to locate himself within the themes of the novel. A more interesting exception, though, is *Survivor* by Charles Palahniuk:

> I'm a huge fan of Palahniuk, and I think I relate the most to him as a writer. He uses words in such a way that that he not only paints pictures, but paints them with emotion….He's new, he's novel, he's not afraid to

> bend or even break the rules and rebuild them as he sees fit. Is it so bad to want to be like him? I almost think it is, because I always thought you should try to blaze your own path. I still am, I think, but I still admire him. I think I'm allowed that.

As a creative writing teacher, my first impulse is to insist that beginning creative writing students should have several writers that they want to be like. However, the mythology of creativity, at least in the United States for the last few decades, has held that artists of whatever stripe must be revolutionary from the very beginning, that they are allowed no apprenticeship period. Any trace of derivation is a sign of artistic failing. Justin's conflict over wanting to be like Palahniuk is an excellent example of how ubiquitous that mythology is. In any event, so much about how Palahniuk constructed *Survivor* fascinates Justin. As he puts it,

> I find it all slightly crazy and completely out of the box, just the entire concept of not only the plot…but the concept behind the physical novel itself (the pages are a friggin' countdown!! I mean, come on!!) It drives me crazy. Can't wait to see where this is taking me.

Because Justin writes almost exclusively about novels, his specific comments, particularly about the craft of the authors, are not abundant. However, what proves more interesting and crucial about his journal is that it shows a reader with exceptional enthusiasm, one who has very specific uses for his cultural literacy that do not necessarily jibe with the kind of literacy sponsored in creative writing classes.

Kathie also quickly grasped the purpose of the reading journal assignment, but in addition to looking at what I might want her to learn about creative writing from the

pieces, she also actively brought her own academic training into her entries. As a graphic arts major, she often used her reading to consider issues in her own discipline. That is, she continually found ways to examine the visual in the texts we read. Thus, she constantly wrote herself, as a visual artist, into her journal. Her tendency to appeal to her more acute visual literacy appears in her very first journal entry, on Ai's "Mother's Tale": "I didn't have a problem with the content but the layout wasn't visually exciting. Maybe if it was broke up to reflect the mother's flow of thoughts it would have been more exciting." One can picture Kathie mentally altering the layout and typography to better serve Ai's message.

In Ai's poem "Twenty-year Marriage," though, her tendency to emphasize the visual becomes more complex, more dependent on the experience of reading the piece. As she puts it, "I like this piece for its formal attributes and technique but it is not a favorite in terms of the visual or feeling I get when I read it. It makes me feel cold and awkward and a voyeur in a not so good way." The emotionally sensitive nature of Ai's poem seems to cause Kathie's gift of visualizing literature to become a disturbing liability. Kathie's comment about how the poem makes her feel like a voyeur is not uncommon, and many students expressed a similar view. In Kathie's case, though, such a sensation seems heightened, because her mind constructs images from what she reads even more habitually than her colleagues.

On the other hand, as her entry on "Trifles" demonstrates, even such an active visualizer as Kathie needs help with slightly more unfamiliar literary genres, such as drama. Many students are not as well trained in reading drama and imagining them as works to be performed live, and Kathie is no exception:

> When I was picturing it, there wasn't much action. I guess I'd have to really see this one acted out. Some of the dialogue was hard to understand as well. I know that is part of the character but if I was watching the performance, I might get lost on some of the background info that's important to understand the reasoning around the supposed murder.

While she expresses mild consternation over the comprehensibility of the details (such as the content of the dialogue,) she still starts to examine what problems an audience might face, and she hints that if she were the director, she would find ways to make the play easier to understand. For instance, she suggests "more action" as a way to help the clue the audience into the play's important details.

Kathie's propensity for the visual also inspires memories and personal reactions from the texts. When discussing Gary Soto's "Black Hair," for instance, the poet's gift for creating vivid mental pictures evokes a personal reaction from Kathie's life: "I liked the imagery formed with this poem. I could picture the baseball field and the people in the stands. Well, a lot has to so with the fact that my little brother played baseball and I'd go to his games." Kathie's entries feature a few of these individual responses to texts. For instance, she mentions that "Sonny's Blues" provoked an emotional reaction because she had a brother fighting addiction and strongly related to the narrator.

By the time she penned her last entry, on Soto's "Oranges," Kathie's penchant for emphasizing how writers configure their texts visually has, if anything, strengthened: "The poem seemed like fragments strung together, which I really liked because it mimicks how I remember things in fragments. With each line I get a separate picture which begins to form a collage. By the end I have a composite of his night." Not only so

we see Kathie working actively to create pictures in her mind from Soto's work, but she conceives of the poem as a collage, a term taken from the visual arts. Her major criticism of the poem, furthermore, lies in visual inconsistencies. As she notes, "I didn't like the second stanza break. The poem didn't begin with that format so this seems odd to the eye. Every line also began with a capitalized letter even if it didn't end the [previous] line with punctuation. It visually bothers me." While the impulse to experience a literary work in visual terms is certainly not uncommon, what is most noteworthy about Kathie is that she actively and consistently employs her visual literacy in the context of the works we read in class. Her entries show that, while she in many ways fulfills the intent of the reading journals, she is also interested in harnessing her cultural literacy to conform to her professional interests as well.

On the other hand, the majority of Erika's journal entries reflected the personal literacy values she brought to the assignment. For the most part, the aspects of the texts she commented on the most were how well she was able to relate to the texts' portrayals. One entry, though, for Glaspell's "Trifles," concentrated on the play's didactic value for illuminating concepts of feminism. However, even her discussion of "Trifles" relies heavily on the concept of relatability that Erika emphasizes throughout her journal:

> The story also portrays how "women" seem to stick up for each other and stick together in hard times too. These two women know the truth, but won't ever tell it. They know exactly how Mrs. Wright feels. I also believe that sometimes women are smarter than men give them credit for.

Not only does Erika explore how the female characters relate to each other (because "they know exactly how Mrs. Wright feels," they can discover the truth,) but she also

looks into how she relates to the themes Glaspell writes about. Erika indicates that like Glaspell, she "believe[s] that sometimes women are smarter than men give them credit for."

This idea of relatability is even better expressed in other journal entries, thus demonstrating how such a notion figures so highly in Erika's reading for the class. For example, in her entry on Joyce's "The Dead" Erika discusses how much she relates to Gabriel, the main character:

> I felt at the end, it was more jealousy that that consumed him about Gretta's past love-life. I will admit that I can get very jealous and so, I think I picked up more on those feelings at the end of the story. When I was reading the story, I felt jealous for Gabriel. I mean, I put myself in Gabriel's shoes and felt very jealous of the boy that died for her and she could bring that up at a moment like that.

The power of the story, for Erika, is Joyce's ability to put her in a similar emotional state as the main character. Joyce's abilities as a writer, in Erika case, are formidable indeed, if he can portray a character of whom Erika feels intensely protective. The characters of the Misses Morkan, in addition, called up an important emotional reaction as well: "His [Gabriel's] aunts also reminded me of my grandparents. How they are so happy and cherishable. It really makes me sad to think that one day, they will be gone."

These analogues to her own family and loved ones permeate Erika's writing about the texts. For instance, her entry on Baldwin's "Sonny's Blues" focuses on how the story brought up issues in her own life, particularly in her relationship with her sister:

> I feel I can relate to the author, James Baldwin, because I am the oldest child and I have a younger sister, by three years, but I feel the same way about her that the author felt about Sonny. Sometimes, I feel that the age difference keeps us apart, and I feel like it's this gap that will never be filled. She is also very quiet and is very independent. She hates it when people try to tell her what to do or control her….I see a lot of parallels in this story between my life and the author's life.

Erika's confusion between the experiences of the author and the narrator of the story are instructive, particularly for how Erika reads many of the literary pieces assigned in the class. The hidden assumption she seems to forward is that for such an emotionally powerful story, the text must be strongly autobiographical. How else, Erika seems to ask, could the author create a work that resonated so deeply with my own life and experiences? The "parallels" that she refers to in her last sentence bespeaks of what Erika looks for in the texts she reads.

Similarly, Haley chronicles her personal reactions to reading a story like "Sonny's Blues," which show that Baldwin has made an impact with Haley: "I liked this piece because it made me think of my sister's relationship and mine. Although we did not have all those same challenges there were different ones but still a struggle in the relationship." In at least one sense, then, Haley has found a way to use Baldwin's story for her own life. In addition, that Baldwin chose not to name the narrator provokes a strong reaction in Haley: "I did not like how the author did not give a name to the older brother. I feel he is a very important person in Sonny's life and is acting or trying to act as a parent and care for Sonny and do not understand why he did not get a name." Haley seems to be

operating from very specific set of literary rules that she feels Baldwin has violated, in which crucial characters must have names. Haley has not yet found her way to being comfortable in the idea that if a character is richly-drawn, a name can sometimes be unnecessary. However, what is noteworthy is that she internalized her set of rules somewhere. As with her discussion of Joyce, she has a sense of narrative convention that has been, up until the class, largely instinctive and untested.

The majority of Sydney's comments, as well, show her emotional responses to "The Dead":

> At first, I found Gabriel to be kind of awkward, and maybe a little self absorbed? Yet—later on, I kind of felt sorry for him when Gretta goes into confession-mode about her previous love as a young girl. It's as though Gabriel had a moment of self-realization at that point. I think the many references to dead people hences the title. (Gretta's first love, etc.)

In her journal, Sydney describes the gamut of reactions she had to Gabriel as a character. She also shows an inkling of perceptiveness when she identifies how Joyce uses epiphanies as moments of "self-realization." The anthology used in Introduction to Creative Writing includes a portion of a letter by James Joyce that begins to define how Joyce conceives of epiphany in short fiction. However, while I hinted that it would be a good idea to look over that section, I did not explain the concept of epiphanies until the class meeting in which we discussed this story. While Sydney shows the beginnings of a discerning eye for literature, her opening journal entry relies more on emotional reaction to the text.

Isabella, on the other hand, delights in the intellectual challenges some of her authors offer her. She confesses her interest in what she terms "all the cliché fantasy novels," like *The Lord of the Rings* series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*, and the Harry Potter series. As we've seen, she is not alone in her passion for these books. Toward the end of her journal, Isabella writes about Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Askaban*, her favorite in the series. She relates her appreciation for the delicate balance Rowling achieves:

> Instead of simple language and plot, she encourages the cognitive process even as she entertains. Her plots are always intricate mysteries, with enough clues to figure out the ending, but disguised so well, you often don't realize it until the end. She incorporates a wealth of knowledge about myth and legend into her books, and even into the names of her characters. In this book, for instance, there is a Professor Lupin, who turns out to be a werewolf. If you were to look up the word lupin (which I did) it means "wolflike." There is so much meat to her books, so much symbolism, foreshadowing—I am certainly an advocate of teaching it in English classes. Oh, there is also in this book, Sirius Black, a man who can turn into a great black dog. Sirius also happens to be the name of a dog-shaped constellation. I love it when authors do stuff like that!
>
> I am inspired by her ability to entertain readers of all ages and by the fact that her books are more than kids solving mysteries, it is a coming of age story as well.

As with her discussion of *Pride and Prejudice*, Isabella only marginally looks at how Rowling achieved the effects in her books. Isabella mentions the incorporating myths and legends into the books as an example of the richness of the texts, and planting clever plays on words (Isabella would love Dickens), but she does not refer to these techniques as ideas for her own writing. Instead, due to her perception of all the complex levels to Rowling's work, Isabella sits back to take in entirety of the writer's accomplishment, refusing to dissect it too thoroughly. Isabella, like many of her peers, devised intricate and complex ways to complete the assignment satisfactorily, while simultaneously enlisting the journal as a means to articulate the literacy she values.

Blaine, too, writes about outside works that hold as much, and probably more, interest for him than the works I assigned for class. His interest in reading works that inspire thinking about his faith appears in a couple entries. For instance, he writes about John Eldridge's *Wild at Heart*, in which he says, "This is a very interesting book. It's about a Christian man's journey find his heart. I haven't finished it yet but it's really good. It has influenced my writing because I enjoy writing about christian ideas." Despite the brevity of this passage, it is interesting because we see how important issues of faith play in Blaine's literacy, important enough to include among the other works he's reading for his journal. An even better example, though, is an entry on *God, the Devil, and Harry Potter* by John Killinger. As we've seen with Isabella, the Harry Potter books constitute a beloved place in Blaine's reading. However, the series has been the object of some concern by many Christian critics. Killinger's book is a minister's answer to those critics. As Blaine mentions,

> The book shows the relationship between the Harry Potter series and the Bible and the similarities between the two. This book influences my writing because I'm a strong Christian and my religion is a big part of who I am. I also enjoy how the book gives a whole new meaning to the Harry Potter books which allows me to enjoy them in a different way when I read them again. It also has inspired me to do something similar, write a fiction and relate it to the Bible but not directly. That would be fun.

The Harry Potter books and Killinger's book achieved something that Joyce and the other authors from the syllabus could not, which is motivate Blaine to try comparable techniques in his own writing, writing that matters to him.

Perhaps one of the best example of how students consciously harness literacy for their own purposes, in very specific contexts, is this excerpt from Zoë's entry on Tepilit Desaitoti's *The Worlds of a Maasai Warrior*, in which she says, "One thing that could be learnt from this work is the ability to make a truthful tale seem fictional. Life is a lot more exciting when it is lived than it is written down and it is important to be able to keep an autobiography interesting." That "life is more exciting when it is lived than [when] it is written down" shows that Zoë holds challenging views of the cultural literacy that many creative writing classes are based on. Reading the great works, for whatever reason, is all well and good, she seems to suggest, but it cannot take the place of living "life" and engaging in important social and political activity. As Zoe's entry points out, these students found multiple uses for all the writing and reading they did over the semester, and only a fraction of it related back to their becoming literary writers. Accounting for this complexity, this agency, in their literacy illustrates that teaching them

how to write involves much more than teaching all the writing tools at their disposal, much more than exposing them to the best models. It also requires us to delve more deeply then we have into their very reasons and purposes for writing and reading in the first place.

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Many of the students in the class—about a third of them—freely expressed their dislike for the reading journal assignment. Some thought it sophomoric, some thought it busy work, and some thought it did not really contribute to their learning. Almost every student in the class, however, thought the class discussions were extremely helpful. I puzzled over this discrepancy until I remembered Shirley Brice Heath's essay. After all, both the reading journal and the class discussions served the same belletristic purpose. However, the class discussions contributed to Heath's idea of "community building," which the journals did not do. In doing so, the discussions blunt the disciplining work of the reading journals, which recall the belletristic study of Hugh Blair's classrooms at the University of Edinburgh through the written and formalized expression of literary study. All this is not say, however, that an assignment such as a reading journal is not useful. The issue, I would suggest, is one more of timing and context. A reading journal would be quite helpful, or example, in an advanced creative writing class, comprised of students who aspire to practice creative writing seriously. For introductory classes, though, with students who are exploring why they are taking such a class, a reading journal might endeavor too zealously to bring the students into the discipline of creative writing, when the students might wish to use their literacy to meet other felt needs.

# Chapter 6

# Conclusion

GRACE: Ugh. Audiobooks. Just another plot to shove books down our throats.
WILL: Yeah. This reading thing has gotten out of hand. I hear they're pushing this junk on kids now.

—*Will and Grace* (2004)

This is a true story: One day, as I was sitting in the Aspen Coffee House working on this dissertation, a young woman walked in the door and began talking systematically with everyone in the coffee shop. She made her way around to me and said, "I'm sorry to bother you, but I was wondering if I could borrow your laptop." She explained that in the gym next door they were shooting promotional photographs for a candidate for the Stillwater School Board, and that no one remembered to bring a laptop for the photograph. I followed her to the gym, weaving through treadmills and Nautilus machines, to a bare dance studio in the back of the establishment.

I set my computer on the lap of a tiny young girl and stood back to take in the mise-en-scène as the photographer composed the photo. The candidate herself, a young woman in a medical coat with stethoscope around her neck, stood at the fore of the scene. About ten to twelve students comprised the rest of the scene, all with some signifier of educational opportunity. There were an inordinate number of balls and athletic equipment represented (this was Oklahoma, after all), several musical instruments, a couple of girls

in dance attire, a girl with a stack of books in front of her, and the young lady with my computer on her lap.

I was fascinated to watch the process of arranging this image, which revealed not only the rhetoric of the promotional photograph, but the values inherent in the message. The candidate needed to articulate that she could provide all the resources needed for students to receive a quality education. Granted, I wondered at the priorities represented; athletic equipment comprised at least half of the material representations of educational endowment, while only one student had a pile of books in front of her. All the same, the arts were decently represented, so I gave the candidate the benefit of the doubt. Also interesting was that the photo could not be complete without technology. Everyone involved in the promotional photo simply could not conceive a complete picture of what the candidate could offer without showing a laptop computer, to the extent that they sent someone in search of a computer to borrow. The photograph, as I saw it taken, seemed a perfect example of the sponsorship that Deborah Brandt writes about. If candidates for the school board are to succeed, they must show what they can provide. In addition, the photo demonstrates an innate awareness of what parents look for in a school board member—someone who promises to provide everything that students need to advance academically. Education and literacy are too serious, the promotional photo tells us, to be left to just anyone. Similarly, a college education represents the ultimate goal of contemporary literacy ideologies. Therefore, providing and consuming a post-secondary education are equally serious business.

Such values and ideologies inform this project. As we've seen, parents figure most prominently as sponsors in the literacy memories (and values) of college students.

Therefore, students must construct identities for themselves that conform to perceptions that they must be devotees of literacy. This rhetorical sophistication also appears in the students' critical writing about literacy. Because literacy is a protean resource, constantly changing in response to social and economic factors, students have to find ways of presenting themselves as adaptable and amenable to new forms of literacy as they emerge; at the same time, the students must also show their allegiance to older, more established forms of literacy. In their essays, then, students demonstrate a remarkable flexibility to cover both ends of the spectrum. While students in the Introduction to Creative Writing class held similar literacy memories as the Critical Analysis and Writing students, they also hinted at complex choices when sitting down to read or write. Many suggested that they apportion their time and energy toward literacy activities that more clearly furthered their goals of degree-attainment and social advancement at the expense of their personal or cultural literacies. At the same time, when pushed toward exploring such non-school-related reading and writing, the students proved very adept at tackling assignments such as reading journals, which were designed to initiate them into a discipline, and re-channel their literacy to serve needs they found much more pressing in their lives.

What this information suggests to me is that if writing teachers are "conflicted brokers" if literacy, as Brandt suggests, then college students are conflicted buyers. They must negotiate between various layers of literacy ideologies that congest the sites of college learning. Universities and colleges are probably the most ideologically packed sites regarding literacy in our culture, and students very aware of it. I have found it helpful to compare literacy practices in college to a bucket of Neapolitan ice cream. For

any given reading or writing situation, should a student dig as deeply as possible into one flavor to the exclusion of others, or scoop a little of each one and skimp on them all? Will one professor prefer mostly vanilla, when the student's Composition I teacher emphasized strawberry? In addition, they have to shuttle between the values embraced by the institution, those of their parents, and those of the outside world that most haven't yet fully experienced. It is no wonder, then, that our students tend to be extremely cautious as they sit down to write or raise their hands to discuss an assigned text. The stakes are high, the terrain is ever-changing, and he rules can change at any moment. Writing teachers are well-placed to address such concerns and help their students adapt, but literacy values, attitudes, and ideologies must be articulated for writing teachers to do any good.

## Discussion of the Study/Implications for Future Research

As we've seen throughout this study, writing and reading are profoundly individualized activities, inextricably bound in specific familial, cultural, and economic milieux. Both literacy researchers and literacy teachers must be constantly aware of and navigate these contexts in order to understand how students learn to write and read. This study has much to offer in beginning to grasp the complex and individual issues that surround literacy use among college students. First, because qualitative research offers much in terms of illuminating the contexts of writing and generating questions for further research, this study is well placed to do both. In addition, because there is a paucity of empirical research on college creative writing students, this work breaks new ground in examining this particular group of students. I will address first the context-rich benefits of this qualitative study, look at the study's contribution to creative writing research, and conclude with the questions that this research generates.

According to Janice Lauer and J. William Asher, the strength of qualitative research is that it

> attempts to give a rich account of the complexity [of literacy practices], a complexity that controlled experiments generally cannot capture. It tries to show the interrelationships among multifaceted dimensions…in order to recognize important variables and to suggest new hypotheses for further study. (45)

Lauer and Asher note, as well, that qualitative research can present problems in generalizability and replicability. Therefore, the conclusions this study reaches could not necessarily be applied to other cultural contexts, even in the United States. However, Stephen North insists that rather than calling for "larger samples or more reliable analyses," qualitative researchers need to "revel in" the complexity and rich portraits that case studies provide (236—37). In addition, this study takes its inspiration from Brandt's in that

> many current debates about literacy education and policy continue to be based largely on indirect evidence, such as standardized test scores or education levels or surveys of reading habits. It is the persistent interest of this study to characterize literacy not as it registers on various scales but as it has been lived. (11)

One of the things that makes this dissertation valuable is that it describes the "lived" literacy practices of a population that has not received much scholarly attention: college students in an ethnically complicated Southern Plains state. As we have seen, the unique ways in which ethnicity and religious faith are lived inform how these students use

reading and writing. Unfortunately, while the literacy habits and abilities of college students are beginning to attract researchers' efforts, the ways in which college students use and think about literacy have not.

Lauer and Asher also point out that qualitative research

> …tries to discover variables that seem important for understanding the nature of writing, its contexts, its development, and its successful pedagogy….This kind of research, therefore, does not primarily attempt to establish cause-and-effect relationships among variables; it seldom has that kind of explicit power. It is, instead, a design that, by close observation of natural conditions, helps the researcher to identify new variables and questions for further research. (23)

This study, then, provides a starting point for looking into how college students consciously craft their reading and writing to meet specific needs. It was never the goal of this study to describe definitively the literacy practices of all college students. This study seeks to begin asking important questions of teachers and researchers; namely, how can we conceive and perceive differently the choices and motivations of our students? This research has shown that our students (and how they make decisions about allocating reading and writing energies) are far more complex than our lore has given them credit for. Perhaps the most important contribution this study provides is to provoke teachers and students to actually communicate to each other, in as clear and explicit terms as possible, what they want from each other. Learning can more easily progress under such conditions. A research agenda that results in better communication should ideally, then, in North's terms, "revel in…complexity and rich portraits" (236—37).

As with literacy research about college students, there is also scant research in creative writing theory and pedagogy. In fact, the literature of creative writing pedagogy contains a very common refrain: we need more research into the field of creative writing pedagogy. For instance, Joseph Moxley's essay in his edited collection, *Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy*, proposes that scholars need to examine how interdisciplinary approaches can help us better teach our students. Hans Ostrom, as well, dedicates an entire section of his prefatory essay in *Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy* to articulating several avenues of further inquiry into the discipline, including suggestions for incorporating qualitative approaches into the research. Part of my project's aims, then, is to contribute in some small way to the burgeoning discussion.

In the spirit of qualitative descriptive research, then, there are numerous opportunities to expand the research I have done throughout this project to enrich the picture it paints. The first suggestion would be to conduct similar studies at different institutions in different parts of the country. How do regional cultures affect the literacy practices and beliefs of their college students? What differences exist for students attending different types of post-secondary institutions; for example, what differences are there between large research institutions and private regional colleges? Where do students at community colleges fit in? Also, utilizing other methodologies would reveal new and interesting possibilities. How might researchers employ individual case studies, interviews, and ethnographies into this line of inquiry? Also, as George Hillocks, Jr., has argued, qualitative and quantitative research need not represent an uncrossable chasm. If they cannot coexist peacefully and productively (as Hillocks argues they do,) they can, as

Lauer and Asher suggest, work collaboratively to produce new knowledge: qualitative description can suggest new hypotheses for quantitative study, which in turn can ask questions that require a deeper look into contextual explanation, and so on. In terms of this study, I'm particularly interested in questions the creative writing students stir. How much time, on average, do they spend reading a literary piece? How many times do they read a piece before they feel they've grasped it? Perhaps more interesting is the notion that they very consciously prioritize their writing and reading choices. The phenomonon deserves much more investigation, because this study only hinted that the students are aware of prioritizing their reading and writing. How do they go about the process? What is the ratio of school-based literacy vs. recreational literacy? Does this ratio change after taking a creative writing class? Another tantalizing possibility is to revisit the differing agendas Durst describes, as outlined in the table in Chapter 1, to see when and how students depart from and conform to Durst's differing agendas.

This project also spurs theoretical inquiry into post-secondary institutions. For example, to what extent are universities literacy sponsors? They seem to have the power, influence, and money to act as sponsors, but how do they benefit from student's literacy? In addition, how do the economic and cultural changes that universities are currently experiencing affect how they provide literacy instruction? What new forces will influence the instruction provided? If the current atmosphere of pragmatic careerism continues, will literacy values revert back to privileging current-traditional pedagogies? Will colleges and universities start to design curricula to support corporate sponsors?

On a related note, this study asks us to consider if Shirley Brice Heath is right when she predicts that the most crucial literacy learning will be decentered from colleges

and universities. Instead, she forecasts that community colleges, community literacy centers, and non-profit or non-school agencies will provide much of the literacy opportunities for those not in public schooling, because the literacy needs of their clients will differ from the specific academic forms of higher education. As she is right, how will that affect the makeup, staffing, curricula, and missions of humanities departments (particularly English) in colleges and universities?

Perhaps the most interesting direction that can be taken from this research is inquiry into the literacy practices, values, attitudes, and memories of writing teachers. What are their histories? How did their experiences make them into the teachers that they are? How do these factors affect hoe and what they teach?

Whatever the direction future research takes, I would urge continued and intensive research into the literacy practices of college students. In a knowledge economy, post-secondary education will remain vital currency. As such, the ways in which we make our literacy instruction effective and viable, as well as how we negotiate the different positions of college students and educators, will continue to occupy the attention not only of faculty and administrators, but politicians and media pundits as well. The more we understand of how our students write and read, the better situated we will be to ease their transition into our higher-education culture, and make them productive, and more importantly, smarter and better citizens in a rapidly-changing culture.

## Implications for Teaching

This project suggests that teachers need to be aware of students' beliefs and attitudes to improve the chances that their students will get as much out of their writing classes as possible. A college education is an expensive investment, and many families

feel they would be doing their children a disservice if they did not provide such training. We cannot ignore these pragmatic reasons for pursuing a higher education. Russel Durst, for example, vigorously questions unexamined dismissals of instrumentalism. While "[s]tudents are badly served indeed, not only in our classes but in all classes, even in their major, when they allow their intellectual and political development to be short-circuited by the attitude that college is only a means to job skills and financial security" (173), Durst suggests that "instrumentalism is too deeply ingrained in U.S. culture and history to be so blithely ignored in composition pedagogy" (172) by scholars such as Kurt Spellmeyer. Spellmeyer's insistence on a "non-instrumentalist,…interpretive, theoretical, and politically aware pedagogy purified of the noxious ills of the marketplace" (Durst 173) ignores, as Brandt has demonstrated, how deeply implicated literacy is in that very marketplace. Our print-based, knowledge economy, I would suggest, requires teachers and students to grapple with how we use literacy as both a resource and a weapon.

A "pedagogy purified of the noxious ills of the marketplace," in addition, reminds me of Susan Miller's warning against relating to students in decontextualized ways, that is, un-gendered, un-raced, un-classed. It is unrealistic, if not impossible, to ask our students to pack away all their goals for their education, all their culturally-reified ideologies, all that they bring with them into our classes when they sit down to study writing and reading. Durst argues that one must be careful, as well, when asking students to sharply criticize a system that they are trying very hard to join. We cannot assume, as well, that there is an uncrossable gulf between "critical pedagogy" (in the many ways it is defined) and pragmatic instrumentalism. Brandt offers us a lesson here as well: her study exposes that sponsors "raise the stakes for literacy in rivalries for advantage. They certify

and often decertify literacy" (193). Literacy is, therefore, an unstable currency, and those previously thought highly-skilled literates can become outdated as sponsors struggle for supremacy. Students' understanding of that instability not only helps them learn to adapt their literacies, but begins to illustrate the inequalities that Spellmeyer would like to change.

The discussion at first seems to ask us to question if we can use the master's tools to dismantle his house. Critical literacy proponents, at least in the United States, assert that we can. However, since most literacy educators are happily ensconced in the master's house, the question soon seems moot—literacy education by its nature operates from that assumption. What is interesting to consider, and what Richard Miller and James Scott explore, is the ways to use language to resist that do not necessarily involve revolution. Consider Susan B. Anthony's brilliant use of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence to blindside opponents of women's suffrage. Anthony did not ask anyone to stop valorizing those documents; instead, she used those values and demonstrated how the United States was not living up to the values it advances. Similarly, the histories of oppressed peoples in this country abound with inventive forms of resistance that push the status quo without inviting wholesale retribution. One example would be African-American slaves using the socially-sanctioned justification of religious instruction as a means to obtain literacy. To expose students to the vicissitudes of literacy, and the mechanisms behind those fluctuations, is a way to introduce students to the inequalities of American society and how literacy, a subject we are supposed to be teaching in the first place, can act as an accomplice in those inequalities.

One possible concrete way of blending instrumentalism with critical thinking is to create assignments that apply to real-world writing situations, and ask students to not only consider the rhetorical context of the assignment, but possible sticky ethical issues. For example, how might a business proposal to computerize essential tasks affect the employees who currently perform those tasks? Does the proposal take that into account? When do economic interests trump the responsibility a business holds to it employees? These are difficult questions that require a great deal of thought from student writers, and go well beyond pedestrian pragmatic concerns.

Another way to approach teaching writing in ways that allow students to perceive the value of their post-secondary literacy education is to look at how genres of writing work. For instance, Michael Carter, in his work on writing in the disciplines, identifies what he calls "metagenres" in academic writing. Carter describes four over-arching kinds of assignments that professors in all the disciplines tend to expect from their students: academic situations that call for problem-solving, academic situations that call for empirical inquiry, academic situations that call for research from sources, and academic situations that call for performance. If one of the purposes for a composition course remains to prepare students for future academic work, then it behooves writing teachers to look at how other disciplines communicate and make knowledge, and then help their students practice those activities before embarking on their subsequent education.

One of Carter's metagenres, writing for academic situations that call for problem solving, is a good example of real-world writing that demands a number of complex cognitive tasks. According to this metagenre, a student should demonstrate proficiency in the following:

a. identify, define, analyze a problem: what it is that generates the problem, what is given, what is unknown, and what are the criteria for viable solutions to the problem
b. determine what information is appropriate to solving the problem and then find it, assess its authority and validity, and use it effectively
c. integrate and apply [relevant knowledge in the field] to the solution of [the problem]
d. offer a range of potential viable solutions to the problem
e. evaluate the solutions according to the established criteria, choose the most viable solution, and make a convincing case for that solution. (395)

Not only would this example help students in their academic work, but in the writing they will do once they graduate. In addition to the pragmatic value of such assignments, this type of writing also asks students to employ critical thinking skills and rhetorical analysis. If a teacher also made the value and purpose of the assignment explicit, the students would be more likely to embrace the assignment, and feel they are getting as much value as possible from their advanced literacy education.

In addition, this study suggests there is still value in asking students to examine critically their own literacy learning. To do so, a composition class could include writing and reading about literacy scholarship as a way to ask students to start thinking metacognitively about how they use literacy, and what values they ascribe to it. However, a different approach than the one I used in the Critical Analysis and Writing II class

might yield better results. More specifically, teachers should be careful asking students to question the literacy values that propelled them into college in the first place. Instead, it might be a good idea to give students an idea of the gamut of different perspectives in literacy studies and ask them to situate themselves in the spectrum between the conservative positions of Birkerts and Postman and the more liberal positions of Street and Stuckey. There would be value, I would argue, in students seeing exactly where they place themselves and why. In doing so, teachers could also ask students to reflect unromantically on why they are pursuing a post-secondary degree. Students could read the work of writers like Caroline Bird, who scrutinizes the value of a college education for the students who undertake it. The ultimate value, though, of such inquiry is that it scaffolds knowledge about literacy and learning that they will hopefully take with them to further university study.

One of the main tools for the inquiry I've been discussing is the literacy narrative, but Richard Miller's institutional autobiography also holds some promise for asking students to write about their learning. The purpose of both genres, of course, is to get ideas, assumptions, and values on paper so that students can begin interrogating them. As we've seen in Chapter 2, students tend to construct archetypal identities for themselves for very strategic reasons. Once the students draft a literacy narrative, they can read Bronwyn William's article on student identities in these narratives, and teachers can then ask the students if they see themselves in Williams' archetypes. Which ones? Are their archetypes Williams has overlooked? And most importantly, *why* do the students think they created these identities for themselves in the first place? Such examinations would lead students closer to the really interesting perspectives on literacy that Myers and

Brandt unveil. Moreover, asking students to write an "institutional autobiography," that is, an exploration of how they have related to the educational organizations that have influenced their lives, provides further insight into why and how they've developed their attitudes and values about literacy and education in the first place. In addition, teachers can use such an assignment to get students to explore the larger cultural value systems in place that affect them as individuals. In other words, an institutional autobiography would provide a fascinating opportunity for students to think about the literacy sponsors in their lives, particularly the powerful ones—the ones that, as Brandt puts it, benefit in some way from individuals' literacy practices (*Literacy in American Lives*, 19). Teachers could also ask students to explore how and when literacy and learning are regulated through, for example bureaucratic procedures; in doing so, teachers could also ask for whom literacy is most tightly recruited, regulated, suppressed, and withheld (Brandt 19). Asking students to explore issues which have social-justice implications, particularly later in an assignment sequence, would give them a taste of Freirean pedagogy (with its attendant examinations of power and language) that might not leave them feeling so alienated in the way Durst describes.

This study, in terms of the field of creative writing, echoes the calls issued by scholars such as Eve Shelnutt, Chris Green, and Nicole Cooley, in that creative writing programs need to rethink how they train prospective teachers, and teachers need to rethink our classroom practices. Eve Shelnutt, for example, has strongly criticized MFA programs for fostering a sense of isolationism between literature and creative writing. This isolationism, Shelnutt argues, puts creative writing students at a disadvantage in the academy and on the job market by refusing to engage MFA students in the intellectual

work of an English department. Shelnutt suggests that "MFA students, as a result of spending time in writing workshops, lack the background necessary for placing newly encountered texts in a historical context" (8). In addition, she reports that her students often confess feeling inadequately prepared to write texts for literate audiences, much less critical articles for scholarly journals. Even as artists, Shelnutt asserts, MFA students suffer from inadequate exposure to literary scholarship:

> MFA students who seek to write essay reviews and general essays about literature…are at a disadvantage if they approach the assessment of literature as if criticism had just been invented. And students who may never, upon graduation, write *about* writing are nonetheless at a disadvantage as *creative* writers if they lack sufficient training by which to evaluate the implications of new formal devices in writing that began as fads. (10, emphasis in original)

There is a sense, in other words, that creative writing students (at all levels) are needlessly inventing the wheel over and over again when they perceive themselves innovating techniques that previous generations of writers actually perfected decades, even centuries, ago.

Chris Green and Nicole Cooley take Shelnutt's argument in another direction. Not only do students need exposure to the art and craft of criticism, but they need an introduction to literary theory. While many in the field of creative writing feel that theory handicaps writers (D.W. Fenza has been perhaps the most outspoken representative), Green and Cooley insist that asking students to ponder assumptions of good writing will overcome the stagnation of American writing that cultural critics blame on "Iowa

Workshop Method" of creative writing instruction. Green, for example, questions the audience for whom most creative writing workshops are aimed. He calls this fictionalized audience the "sublime reader"—a conglomerized construction that is supposed to represent a "mainstream," literate, college-educated reader, but is nevertheless raced, gendered, and classed. "In creative writing," Green offers,

> we owe it to our students to examine how texts actually exist and are used in the world beyond the workshop. The workshop needs to address lived situations rather than assuming and perpetuating the presence of a falsely sublime (generally white, educated, middle-class) reader. (162)

Green's notion of looking at how poems are "used in the world beyond the workshop" leads him to suggest that teachers should ask students to examine how a poem is used "within specific cultural institutions of production, distribution, and consumption…to train themselves to write 'good' poems that can act with efficacy within particular cultural institutions" (159). The value of Green's work, I would argue, is that it requires students to question modernist notions of the canon and literary tradition, which does not, in my experience, happen in a creative workshop. Whether students are moved to create work for their specific chosen communities is immaterial; rather, it is more crucial to help students attain flexibility in written communication based upon historical and social context.

Indeed, Nicole Cooley emphasizes that very point in her work. Rather than perpetuating romantic notions of joining the immortal line of great writers, teachers, Cooley suggests, should help students understand the complex cultural forces at work in literary appreciation:

> In literature classes we recognize that literary codes are historically contingent, but there is little discussion of this issue in creative writing classrooms. To avoid…universalism…we need to discuss the fact that aesthetic value is historically and culturally specific. (102)

Creative writing, as Ted Lardner suggests, has much to learn from composition, and I would argue that James Berlin, in his article "The Major Pedagogical Theories," clarifies much of what creative writing has to grapple with. How we teach students to write, Berlin asserts, reflects how we perceive reality. Thus, we not only teach students how to write, but we also impart assumptions and ideologies about what reality is, and how we apprehend it. We currently do not offer creative writing students that option, and I would argue that we do a disservice to students by not asking them to grapple, at least a little, with these concepts as creative writers.

By the same token, composition has much to learn from creative writing. As Lardner argues, the field of composition remains interested in preparing students for academic writing, and the field has not emphasized extracurricular or extra-scholarly writing (76). In addition, creative writing urges writers to experiment with language and literary forms. Lardner suggests that

> [o]ne of the justifications for the production and study of so-called 'imaginative literature' in composition may be found here, insofar as in such works, we are apt to encounter mold-breaking strategies and experimentation with expressive form. (77)

The value of such a discussion, I think, is that creative writing can be used to ask students to what extent they write discourse or are written by it. Composition currently embraces a

poststructuralist view that students, as with reality itself, are products of discourse. Asking students to embrace formal and linguistic experimentation requires them to start thinking about their own agency as subjects as they write.

Writing teachers, at all levels, will continue to worry about how much, how joyfully, and how well our students read and write. Most of us entered the profession because these two activities, reading and writing, remain our favorite things to do. We often forget, though, that we are a minority. Of all the times I have mentioned my job to new acquaintances in small talk, I cannot remember one person replying that they loved English or writing. Instead, every one related how their English classes made them anxious. Invariably, they also say, "Oh no, I guess I should watch what I say, huh?" My students have also told me, in no uncertain terms, that they would never want to do what I do. That so many people have such a strong reaction to my being a writing teacher illustrates, I think, how much I represent the power, authority, and privilege that literacy imparts in our culture. This research has shown that students are always aware of the ideologies of literacy that our society embraces, and that negotiation with those ideologies is a requirement to functioning and thriving. While we may not always manage to teach our students to love writing and reading the way we do, we do have the responsibility to help them master the literate skills they need not only to flourish in a knowledge economy, but to contribute as well-informed and conscientious citizens.

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# Appendix A—IRB Approval

**Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board**

| | |
|---|---|
| Date: | Wednesday, February 22, 2006 |
| IRB Application No | AS0668 |
| Proposal Title: | Literacy Sponsorship and Literacy Attitudes in College Writing Classrooms |
| Reviewed and Processed as: | Exempt |

**Status Recommended by Reviewer(s): Approved Protocol Expires: 2/21/2007**

Principal Investigator(s

Michael McCamley
205 Morrill Hall
Stillwater, OK 74075

Ronald Brooks
205 Morrill
Stillwater, OK 74078

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The IRB application referenced above has been approved. It is the judgment of the reviewers that the rights and welfare of individuals who may be asked to participate in this study will be respected, and that the research will be conducted in a manner consistent with the IRB requirements as outlined in section 45 CFR 46.

☒ The final versions of any printed recruitment, consent and assent documents bearing the IRB approval stamp are attached to this letter. These are the versions that must be used during the study.

As Principal Investigator, it is your responsibility to do the following:

1. Conduct this study exactly as it has been approved. Any modifications to the research protocol must be submitted with the appropriate signatures for IRB approval.
2. Submit a request for continuation if the study extends beyond the approval period of one calendar year. This continuation must receive IRB review and approval before the research can continue.
3. Report any adverse events to the IRB Chair promptly. Adverse events are those which are unanticipated and impact the subjects during the course of this research; and
4. Notify the IRB office in writing when your research project is complete.

Please note that approved protocols are subject to monitoring by the IRB and that the IRB office has the authority to inspect research records associated with this protocol at any time. If you have questions about the IRB procedures or need any assistance from the Board, please contact Beth McTernan in 415 Whitehurst (phone: 405-744-5700, beth.mcternan@okstate.edu).

Sincerely,

Sue C. Jacobs, Chair
Institutional Review Board

# Appendix B—ENGL 1413 Syllabus

> "Surrounded by multiple, conflicting voices within their own minds, [students have] to create what I am calling a *negotiated* meaning of literacy….[T]hey construct a reflective, provisional resolution; they set priorities and construct an understanding in the presence of trade-offs.
> …
>
> Theory is no longer a commodity exchanged by theorists whose conflicts students only observe. Learning to take literate action is learning to live in a complicated world where theory is tested and ideas such as literacy take on a negotiated meaning.
> …
>
> A pedagogy of literate action, this pedagogy for the 21st century could do more than recreate the theory wars….[I]t could invite students to test and temper the generalities of theory with observation of real situations and to apply observation-based reflection to their own writing. Thus, they could build more actively negotiated working theories on their own."
>
> —Linda Flower, "Literate Action"

**Critical Analysis and Writing II, Spring 2006: The Battle over/for Your Mind!**

ENGL 1413, section 001: MWF 9:30—10:20 a.m.
Morrill 102
Instructor: Michael McCamley
Office: 408 Morrill Hall
E-mail: m.mccamley@okstate.edu
Office Hours: MWF 10:30—11:30 a.m., or by appointment.


There are three ways to contact me outside of class: email, office hours, and telephone. Do not leave messages for me at the English Department office. Also, do not leave messages at my office with other teachers. Such messages are often lost. I encourage you to contact me via email with your questions or concerns. If you have an unexcused absence, you should contact a classmate you trust for accurate information about the day's events.

**Blackboard Site**: **blackboard.okstate.edu**

**Required Texts**
Jacobus, Lee A. *World of Ideas*. 7th ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006.

Other required reading is available on the Blackboard site.

You should also purchase four basic two-pocket folders, a large blue book, and budget about $10 for copies or a copy card.

**Course Goals**
English 1413 is designed to enhance your ability to read, write, and analyze information critically and effectively. You are expected to conduct some academic library research, use outside information appropriately and critically in your own writing, and document all of your sources correctly. This is primarily a workshop course. Most in-class activities will be completed in groups and are not listed on the syllabus, so regular attendance is extremely important.

**Program Director**
Dr. Richard Batteiger (Morrill 302C)

**Attendance**
Missing class means that you will miss much of the writing process; therefore, attendance is extremely important and will be reflected in your grade. **Please note that you will be considered tardy if you are more then ten minutes late to class**. Every three tardies (arriving ten minutes or more later than the time class is scheduled ot begin) will be considered one absence. Be aware that my policy is that it is my job to accurately document your presence or absence. It is not, however, my responsibility to monitor your attendance for you. I will not warn you or nag you if your absences become excessive enough to jeopardize your grade. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of your absences.

You are expected to be present every day your class meets, but I do allow a specific number of absences without penalty. Absences beyond the limit are considered excessive and result in grade reductions. The only absences that do not count toward the total allowed are those taken for mandatory military service and activities required for classes or scholarships. **No other absences will be considered "excused," including absences due to illnesses, doctor's appointments, and emergencies.** Reductions will be taken on a percentage basis from the total number of points possible in the course:

6 absences without automatic grade reduction
7 absences = a final grade reduction of 5%
8 absences = a final grade reduction of 10%
9 absences = a final grade reduction of 15%
10 or more absences = failure of the course.

**Late work**
Grades of work defined as "late" (coming in after the class period in which it was due) will be reduced by 5% of the total points possible for the assignment each day it is late, including weekends. This policy includes drafts as well as final copies. If you miss a conference or peer-editing session, I will reduce your grade by 5%. Note that I will accept late drafts and final copies of the major essay assignments if need be, but I will not accept late daily assignments, such as quizzes and Annotations and Responses.

**Missing work**
You must complete all drafts and all final copies of the four major graded papers in order to receive credit for the course.

**Participation and in-class work**
You are expected to come to class with all books and writing materials, and to interact with both myself and your peers in a collegial and professional manner. Come prepared every class to write about and discuss the readings and assignments. You are also expected, of course, to have prepared **in advance** the assigned work for that day. While this course tends to be informal (I hope we can even have some fun,) I do expect that everyone will behave in an appropriate manner. Please be respectful of fellow students. I also expect a reasonable amount of effort. If you absolutely hate participating or find that you cannot participate appropriately, drop the course immediately. Consider this fair warning: We will be sharing a lot over this semester—our perspectives, thoughts, writing—and I make no exceptions for anyone. If this does not appeal to you, you should reconsider the course.

**Classroom Etiquette**
As mentioned above, this class tends toward the informal. However, this is not license to openly disrespect other students or the instructor by reading the *O'Colly* during class time, sleeping, text-messaging, excessive talking that is not related to class, etc. Please turn off cell phones, pagers, and MP3 players before class begins. I will respond to disruptions by asking you to leave and counting you absent for the day.

**Extra Credit**
If a student wishes extra credit, I would be delighted to discuss the possibility. I will allow students to revise the Connections Essay, the Annotated Bibliography, and the Argument from Research Essay for a higher grade. However, these revisions must be handed in to me (including all drafts and a 1-2 page typed paper explaining what you changed and why you changed it) within one week from the date your received your graded essay. I will be looking for a true revision, not simply an "edited" essay. Other projects are also an option, but each student must propose a project and then we will discuss how many points the project will be worth.

**Writing Center**

I encourage you to visit the Writing Center early and often. Experience has shown that writers who visit the Writing Center usually produce better essays and, by consequence, often receive better grades. Remember to take with you the written assignment handout for the tutor's reference and take careful and copious notes during your visit. Also, be sure to note the tutor's name for future reference. For more information or to make an appointment, call 744-6671 or log on to http://www.writing.okstate.edu.

**Plagiarism**

Plagiarism is the representation of someone else's ideas as if they were one's own. Where the arguments, data, designs, etc. of someone else are being used in a paper, report, oral presentation, or similar academic project, this fact must be made explicitly clear by citing the appropriate references. The references must fully indicate the extent to which any parts of the project are not one's own work. Also, one must not suppose that only verbatim copying requires crediting. Paraphrasing someone else's ideas is still using someone else's ideas, and must be acknowledged. Plagiarism and other acts of academic dishonesty are not condoned nor tolerated at Oklahoma State University, and such instances can have numerous and unpleasant consequences, including a grade of "F" for the assignment and possibly suspension or expulsion from the university. If you have any questions, please see me.

**General grading standards**

"A" work goes above and beyond the basic requirements. It is organized, clear, effective, eloquent, and insightful writing. It has an original, convincing, and inventive thesis, specific and well-constructed evidence and support, seamless organization, and smooth transitions. There are sporadic or rare mechanical errors.

"B" work has a clear, concise, and interesting thesis. This essay will also show thoughtful efforts that go beyond the basic requirements, but there may be holes in the essay where organization and use of evidence could have been more effective. Summary is limited only to what is necessary in favor of critical analysis. Organization and transitions are handled capably. In "B" work and above, quotations, citations, and attribution are used well. There are few mechanical errors.

"C" work is the measure against which all other grades are determined. The essay meets the minimum basic requirements of the assignment, but little else in terms of execution, presentation, and attention to the potential of the task is achieved. A thesis is stated, but may be clichéd or unfocused. The essay attempts to answer the question or address the instructor's expectations. Some critical engagement of texts is present, but unnecessary summary or "fluff" weaken the essay's effectiveness. The essay shows evidence of a competence with paragraphing and a rudimentary sense of organization.

"D" work meets only some of the requirements of the assignment, or the assignment was misunderstood. The thesis is difficult to determine, if it exists at all. There is no critical analysis and no evidence present. There is little organization and poor transitions.

"F" work does not meet any of the requirements for the assignment, nor does it address the question or the instructions. There is no thesis, no organization, no supporting evidence, and numerous grammar, punctuation, and usage errors.

**Format of submitted papers**
All work prepared outside of class should be typed, double-spaced, one-inch margins on all sides, with no extra spaces between paragraphs. In the upper-left-hand corner of the first page, type your name, the class and section number, the name of the assignment (e.g. Essay 1, Annotation and Response 3,) and the date, like this:

Joe Cowboy
ENGL 1413, section 001
Connections Essay Rough Draft
February 31, 2006

This information should be the only single-spaced text on the page. Do not include a title page. Be sure to include page numbers somewhere prominent (upper-right corner and bottom center are good places.) Choose a readable font, such as 12-point Times. I'm interested in your writing, not your typography.

Your four major essay projects must be turned in for grading in pocket folders **with appropriate works cited pages, photocopies of the pertinent pages (those pages that are the sources of your quotations and paraphrases) of all source materials, and all preceding drafts of the essay**. Assignments that do not include all of these components will not be accepted.

Please turn in **2 copies** of your essay in a folder with all the drafts and notes for that particular essay.

Turn in Annotations and Responses stapled, but not in a folder.

Important note: **Keep every piece of writing you produce in this class, no matter how trivial you think it may be**, at least until after the end of the term. You never know when something will prove useful.

**Course requirements**

| Assignment | Percentage | Point Value | Your Score |
|---|---|---|---|
| Literacy Narrative | 10% | 100 | |
| Connections Essay | 15% | 150 | |
| | | | |
| The Research Project: | | | |
| Annotated Bibliography | 15% | 150 | |
| Argument from Research Essay | 25% | 250 | |
| Presentation of Research | 5% | 50 | |
| | | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Leading Discussion | 5% | 50 | |
| Take-Home Essay Exam | 10% | 100 | |
| Annotations and Responses | 15% | 150 | |
| **Total Grade** | **100%** | **1000** | |

**Literacy Narrative** (worth 100 points)
You will start drafting the literacy narrative by filling out a questionnaire I'll hand out on the second day of class. I'll give you some time in class to work on the questionnaire, but you may have to complete some of it outside of class. From that you will write a 2—3 page essay for peer review on Wednesday of Week 2, based on your previous writing. Answer this question: How would you describe your reading life/practices/beliefs/attitudes, and what has contributed to that?

I'll be looking for thesis, evidence, and organization.

**Connections Essay** (worth 150 points)
For this essay, I'd like you to choose **two** of the texts we've recently discussed: **Birkerts**, **Franzen**, **Postman**, and **Hirsch**. If you'd like, you may go to the library and find an extra source on your own. With these sources, answer this question:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with your authors about the state or importance of literacy in the U.S.?

I'll grade this essay based on these criteria: Thesis, evidence/support, organization, and transitions. Be sure to cite your sources properly (both in-text and Works Cited page) in MLA format.

**The Research Project**

**The Proposal**
While the proposal is not technically worth any points, you must still clear your research project with me before you can hand in any subsequent part of the project. Your proposal should be a page or two describing your topic, why you're interested in it, what's important about it, what kind of preliminary research you've done, what you've found out, and why I should let you spend the better part of a semester researching it. The trick is to get me interested enough in your topic that I want to see the end result at the end of the semester.

The topics for this class will be limited to issues of literacy and education, which is a much more broad area than you might initially think. For instance, you can think about:

- Definitions of literacy—how do we define literacy? What kind of activity is it? How do our definitions determine how we approach the issue, and how do our definitions help or hinder our efforts?

- ❖ Other literacies—visual literacy, electronic literacy, hypertext literacy—how has the proliferation of new forms of media changed how we read? How well trained are we in visual and/or electronic literacies? How could we define being "literate" electronically, visually, online, etc.?

- ❖ Illiteracy—what are the most effective ways to improve literacy in the U.S.? Other countries? What are the best pedagogies for teaching people to read? What problems exist in literacy instruction?

- ❖ Aliteracy/motivation to read—to what extent are Americans abandoning reading? What can be done? Should anything be done?

- ❖ Reading habits—How and what do people read in the U.S. (or other countries)? What changes have taken place in the past few years? Why should anyone care?

You are free to explore other topics related to literacy and/or education, but to do so, you must talk with or interview an expert in the field, such as a professor, and come up with a topic that (1) even the experts in the field are debating and have no consensus or clear correct answer, (2) is not a pro/con, either/or debate, and (3) is not something about which you already have strongly-held opinions. The point is to start asking questions, not back up an already formulated viewpoint. Please come see me if you want to look into possible topics with an expert in a disclipline. I have a form I'd like you to fill out and the professor or expert to sign.

If this research project fits with what you're doing in another class, you might consider using your efforts for both classes. However, if you choose this option, you **must** clear it with both me and your other professor. You might be required to write two separate papers on the same topic, but with all the research you'll have done, there should be no problem.

Make sure you choose a topic that will hold your interest and that there is enough material on the topic. **If you change topics during the semester, you'll have to start over from the very beginning and do another proposal, bibliography, analysis, etc.** Therefore, you'll probably want to choose a good topic from the very beginning.

**The Annotated Bibliography** (worth 150 points)
You will compile an annotated bibliography of 10—12 sources on your topic. Each of the entries will have two components: the bibliographic information and the abstract. Depending on your topic and the approach you're taking to the project, the bibliographic information can be either MLA, APA, or Chicago style, whichever is most appropriate, but let me know which style you're using so I can check if you're using the style correctly.

The annotations should be in the form of a short paragraph (aim for approximately 150—200 words) and should contain the following information: the primary claim the source makes (a paraphrase of the thesis, not just "this book is about…"), and an explanation of

the types of evidence given (not the specific evidence, just the type) or how the claim is proven. We will discuss more about writing abstracts, as well as practice, in class.

The sources must be quality sources (think of our hierarchy of sources.) Types of sources that will not count include encyclopedias, reference books, Cliff's Notes or similar publications, abstracts, and discussions with your roommate. You may include movies, documentaries, and TV shows if (and only if) you have all the appropriate bibliographical information. You should also feel confident that you will be able to refer back to them at a later date (i.e., is there a videotape or DVD available to view again?) You may include interviews, but make sure they are with experts in the field you are researching, are more substantial than asking them yes or no questions, and have it recorded in some way. If you have any questions or ideas about sources, please come talk to me.

Here is a good example of an entry from *Nineteenth-Century Literature* (this example is in MLA format):

Elfenbein, Andrew. "Whitman, Democracy, and the English Clerisy." *Nineteenth-Century Literature*. 56 (2001): 76—101.

It has long been a puzzle of literary history that in the nineteenth century Walt Whitman enjoyed far greater popularity in England than in the United States. Elfenbein argues that Whitman became in England the poet of "populist elitism," a movement to reinvent the traditional role of the clerisy on the part of men newly enfranchised by the Third Reform Act. To admire Whitman was to be both an ardent democrat and a member of a privileged sector of society that could appreciate the poet's daring unconventionality. The pivotal figure in this popularity was the poet and socialist Edward Carpenter, whose career must be understood in the context of the nineteenth-century reception of Coleridge's ideal of the clerisy. Disillusioned with the possibilities for the clerisy available from traditional English institutions, Carpenter transferred its mission to the appropriation and dissemination of Whitmanian democracy. His poem *Towards Democracy* (1883—85) revises the diction, self-preservation, and sexual ethos of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass* (1855) to make Whitman useful to an English audience. Yet in deserting the traditional institutions of the clerisy for Whitman's vision, Carpenter created a gap that has yet to be resolved between idealistic aspirations for democratic culture and the means for creating social change.

Here is an example of an entry from the *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management.* It's in APA style:

Molesworth, M., & Scullion, R. (2005). The impact of commercially promoted vocational degrees on the student experience. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 27, 209—225.

Exploratory focus group research with undergraduate students reveals a series of related tensions that students experience about vocational marketing and communication degrees that have been promoted to them primarily on the basis of job prospects and university

location. Molesworth and Scullion summarize these tensions in six themes: short versus long-term goals; academic/social life balance; time to study/work; importance of theory versus practical skills; intrinsic motivations to study versus assessment orientation; and the differing requirements of a tutor. The authors argue that the often intuitive choices that students make as a result of these tensions may result in their failing to engage with much of what constitutes a degree, especially scholarly activity. Although these tensions may be common to all students, the authors question whether some approaches to promoting vocational degrees, and the curriculum priorities sometimes given to these types of degrees may influence the resolution of tensions in ways that do not encourage effective learning. Molesworth and Scullion conclude by suggesting the need for reflection and responsibility in the higher education sector's promotional activities and in the teaching of vocational degrees.

Note that your entries should be double-spaced and arranged alphabetically. Each annotation should consist of:

- A complete and correct MLA Works Cited page citation or APA References page citation.
- A 150—200-word summary of the source, including argument, supporting points, kinds of evidence, relationships to other sources, etc.

I'll evaluate your annotated bibliography based on the completeness of your entries, the quality of your sources, the correctness of your citations, and the efficiency and concision of your prose.

Note that your entries should be should be double-spaced and alphabetized with the abstract following the bibliographic citation.

**Argument from Research Essay** (worth 250 points)
This is the big one. This is the culmination of the research you've been doing all semester. You must use at least 8—10 sources, most of which you discussed in the annotated bibliography, although you'll most likely include new sources. For this essay, you must make a claim of your own, in answer to a research question that you've formulated. You must support your claim and ideas with sources. Be sure to include copies of your sources with your essay.

Here is a possible outline for this essay. Please deviate from this structure as your essay demands:

- Introduction—How can you orient and interest your reader to your topic?
- Research review—what have other scholars written? How would you characterize the discussion?
- Your own contribution—Take this opportunity to answer questions or engage issues that no one else has addressed.
- Conclusion—You can use the conclusion to recap your argument and tell your readers why they should care.

We'll discuss ways of approaching this essay before you begin drafting. I will also be arranging individual conferences to discuss this essay. Class will not meet on conference days, but your conference will count as your attendance for those days. Remember, also, that I have the option to reduce your grade on this essay of you miss a conference. Please bring an early completed draft. The closer you are to completion, the more help I can be.

I will evaluate your essay based on these criteria: a clear, interesting, debatable thesis; solid evidence and support (including smooth and effective incorporation of quotations); clear organization; smooth transitions; engaging and readable introduction; satisfying conclusion; and correct citations.

**Take-Home Final Essay Exam** (worth 100 points)
For the final essay exam, I'd like you to look back over the reading, writing, and thinking we've done over the semester. Look, in particular, at your literacy narrative. How differently do you view your literacy practices, beliefs, and attitudes now, after spending a semester learning about the debates in literacy education?

**Presentations** (worth 50 points)
You've done all of this research. You're an expert in this field. Not sharing your vast knowledge with others seems like being all dressed up with nowhere to go, don't you think? Therefore, as part of your research project, you will give a short (5—7 minute) presentation on your topic. Note that you will not have time to simply read your paper, so you should give an abbreviated version of your research. Remember, handouts and/or other visual aids are always a good idea. I'll give you an overall holistic grade based on how prepared you are, how well you keep your audience (the class, including me) interested, and how clearly and understandably you present your information.

**Leading Discussion** (worth 50 points)
Once during the semester, you'll lead discussion on an assigned reading. The best discussion leaders brainstorm complex discussion questions to help everyone deeply analyze the text, and develop class activities to engage the class actively in scrutinizing the text. Feel free to meet with me to talk about discussion ideas.

The **Annotations and Responses** (worth 150 points total) are reading responses that ask you to comment directly on a text and further explain your margin comments in a separate brief document. You will complete five Annotations and Responses this semester. The due dates are listed on the course schedule. Here is the format for the Annotations and Responses:

Make a copy of the source and make margin notes on the copy. You'll need to

Make at least three notes per page in the margins. Here are some suggestions (which are by no means exhaustive of your possibilities):

- Some use of rhetorical strategy (appeals to pathos, ethos, or logos; different kinds of evidence; tone, audience considerations, etc.) Are these examples successful or inept? Why do you think so?

- Assumptions the author makes—are they explicit, honest, implicit, cagey, etc.? Are the author's assumptions problematic?
- Connections to other texts—what does the reading call to mind for you? What else do you think of? Don't be afraid to make wide-ranging and possibly off-the-wall connections. You might be on to something!
- Questions the text raises but doesn't answer.
- Note any sentence(s) or phrase(s) that jump out at you. Why? What about them catches your attention?

**Then**, on a separate sheet of paper (remember to include your name, the class and section number, the name of the assignment, and the date in the left-hand corner of the first sheet,) choose at least three of your annotations and discuss them in greater detail.

**Grading Scale**
The total number of points in this course is 1000, which makes a breakdown very easy:

A: 900—1000
B: 800—899
C: 700—799
D: 600—699
F: 599 & below

Please note that with this scale, I do not round up scores.

**Class Schedule** (Everything is, of course, tentative.)

| Day | Assignments | Reminders |
|---|---|---|
| **Jan 9 (M)** | Introduction to class and each other. | |
| **Jan 11 (W)** | In-class writing. | |
| **Jan 13 (F)** | Have read Douglass in *World of Ideas*, pp. 265—276. | Jan 17 (T) is the last day to add a course. It is also the last day to drop a course with no fees or grade, or for a 100% refund on withdrawal. |
| **Jan 16 (M)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Martin Luther King Day |
| **Jan 18 (W)** | Have read Birkerts (Blackboard). | |
| **Jan 20 (F)** | Continue with Birkerts. | Last day to drop a course with 50% refund. |
| **Jan 23 (M)** | Have read Franzen (Blackboard). | |
| **Jan 25 (W)** | Peer review. | |
| **Jan 27 (F)** | **Literacy Narrative due**. Continue with Franzen. | |

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|---|---|---|
| **Jan 30 (M)** | Have read Postman (Blackboard). | |
| **Feb 1 (W)** | Continue with Postman. | |
| **Feb 3 (F)** | Have read Hirsch (Blackboard). | |
| **Feb 6 (M)** | **Annotation and Response #1** (over Douglass, Birkerts, Franzen, Postman, **OR** Hirsch) **due**. Continue with Hirsch. | |
| **Feb 8 (W)** | No class—conferences. | |
| **Feb 10 (F)** | **Connections Essay due**. Discussion of Research Project. | |
| **Feb 13 (M)** | Library day. | |
| **Feb 15 (W)** | Have read Knoblauch (Blackboard). | |
| **Feb 17 (F)** | In-class proposal of research project. | |
| **Feb 20 (M)** | Have read Johnson (Blackboard). | |
| **Feb 22 (W)** | **Annotation and Response # 2** (over Knoblauch, Johnson, **OR** Freire) **due**. Have read Freire in *World of Ideas*, pp. 318—331. | |
| **Feb 24 (F)** | Library day. | |
| **Feb 27 (M)** | Have read Landow (Blackboard). | |
| **Mar 1 (W)** | Continue with Landow. | |
| **Mar 3 (F)** | Have read Welch (Blackboard). | |
| **Mar 6 (M)** | **Annotation and Response #3** (over Landow **OR** Welch) **due**. Continue with Welch. | |
| **Mar 8 (W)** | Practice with annotated bibliography entries. | |
| **Mar 10 (F)** | Practice with annotated bibliography entries. | |
| **Mar 13 (M)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Spring Break |
| **Mar 15 (W)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Spring Break |
| **Mar 17 (F)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Spring Break |
| **Mar 20 (M)** | **Annotation and Response #4** (over one of your sources from your research) **due**. Peer review of Annotated Bibliography. | |
| **Mar 22 (W)** | Discussion of *Renaissance Man*. | Optional screening of *Renaissance Man*: Tuesday, March 21, 5:00 p.m. Morrill 303 |
| **Mar 24 (F)** | **Annotated Bibliography due.** Discussion of *Dangerous Minds*. | Optional screening of *Dangerous Minds*: Thursday, March 23, 5:00 p.m. Morrill 303 |
| **Mar 27 (M)** | Catch-up day. **Annotation and Response #4 Due.** | |
| **Mar 29 (W)** | Have read Bartholomae (Blackboard). | |
| **Mar 31 (F)** | **Annotated Bibliography Due.** Continue with Bartholomae. | |

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|---|---|---|
| **April 3 (M)** | Have read Rose (Blackboard). | |
| **April 5 (W)** | Have read Street (Blackboard). | |
| **April 7 (F)** | **Annotation and Response #5** (over Bartholomae, Rose, **OR** Street) **due**. Continue with Streey. | Last day to drop a course (grade of "W")<br>Last day to withdraw from all courses with automatic "W" |
| **April 10 (M)** | Library Day. | **SCREENING** of *Renaissance Man*: Mon. April 10th, at 2:30 in **Morrill 305** |
| **April 12 (W)** | Discussion of *Renaissance Man*. Discussion led by Elizabeth Steinocher and Elizabeth Straigis. | **SCREENING** of *Dangerous Minds:* Wed. April 12th, at 3:30 in **Morrill 303** |
| **April 14 (F)** | Discussion of *Dangerous Minds*. | |
| **April 17 (M)** | No Class—Conferences. | |
| **April 19 (W)** | No Class—Conferences. | |
| **April 21 (F)** | **Argument from Research Essay due**. Begin presentations. | Last day to withdraw from all courses with assigned "W" or "F" |
| **April 24 (M)** | Presentations. | Pre-finals week |
| **April 26 (W)** | Presentations. | Pre-finals week |
| **April 28 (F)** | Wrap up presentations and discuss Take-Home Exam. | Pre-finals week |
| **Finals** | Take-Home Exam due to me by 3:00 p.m., Friday, May 5th | |

# Appendix C—Literacy Narrative Questionnaire for ENGL 1413

**Literacy Narrative Questionnaire**

*On another sheet of paper, please write your responses to the following questions:*

What level of education have your family members (parents, grandparents, older siblings) attained? How does that affect how you view reading, writing, and learning?

What's your first memory of reading? How old were you? Why is the memory so unforgettable? What did this experience mean to you at the time?

What are your earliest memories of direct or indirect instruction in writing/reading before you started school?

What memories do you have of learning to read and write in elementary school?

What reading and writing have you done with peers or friends? What reading and writing are you doing now with peers or friends?

What reading and writing do you do outside of school?

Who was most influential in how you learned to read/write?

What were the most influential events in how you learned to read and write?

Think of all the different kinds of reading/writing you've done in the past six months (all decoding of texts—e-mail, text messaging, magazines, billboards, novels, bus schedules, school reading, etc.) Which of these activities are literate? Why do you think so?

Why are you pursuing your education? What do you want to get out of it?

What do you want to get out of your English classes?

How is important is reading and writing in your life? What values do you place on reading and writing?

How do you use reading and writing? What purposes do they serve?

How would you describe what your reading life? What's your relationship to reading? How has that relationship changed throughout your life? Do you like reading? Why or why not? What does reading mean to you now? What do you love to read? Why? What do you tend to read, and is that different from what you love to read? Why or why not?

# Appendix D—ENGL 2513 Syllabus

> Was not writing…a secret transaction, a voice answering a voice? So that all this chatter and praise, and blame and meeting people who admired one and meeting people who did not admire one was as ill-suited as could be to the thing itself—a voice answering a voice.
>
> —Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

| | |
|---|---|
| Introduction to Creative Writing | English 2513, Section 001 |
| Spring 2006 | MWF 12:30—1:20 p.m. |
| Instructor: Michael McCamley | Morrill 307 |
| Instructor's Office: Morrill 402 | Office Hours: MWF 10:30—11:30 a.m., or by appointment |

E-mail: m.mccamley@okstate.edu


**Required Texts**

- *The Longman Masters of Short Fiction*, ed. Gioia and Gwynn
- *Contemporary American Poetry*, ed. Poulin and Waters
- You should also invest in an inexpensive two-pocket folder and a notebook for your reading journal.

**Course Description**

Introduction to Creative Writing is a chance to read and write short fiction, poetry, and drama as part of a community of writers. This class is premised on the assumption that by taking this class, all of you are committed to becoming better writers of literature for an educated, well-read audience. It is also based on the idea that one cannot be a good writer if one is not a good reader. To that end, we will read and discuss works in all three genres that provide models of various aspects of the creative writing craft. We will discover the delicate balance of inspiration and discipline, *including revision*, that augurs success as a writer. We will use the workshop model of instruction, in which the entire class reads, comments upon, and discusses every student's work at some point, and in the process learn the language and etiquette of the creative writing workshop.

**Course Requirements**

Your Drafts: Several times this semester, you'll submit some of your writing—1-3 poems, a short story, a short play—for the class to workshop. See below for workshop guidelines. Although your work will not be discussed in class as often as you or I might like, I'll try to work everyone in as as fairly as possible.

Portfolio of Representative Work: At the end of the semester, I'll ask you to submit a portfolio of what you feel is your best work from all three genres—one or two prose fiction pieces, three to four poems, and one or two short plays. Include drafts as well as the revised version. I'd also like you to include a brief (one—two page) self-assessment in the form of a letter to me discussing your strengths and weaknesses as a writer, what you've learned from this semester, what you feel you still need to learn, and any other pressing issues or concerns you'd like to bring up.

Reading Journal: With your portfolio, I'll ask you to submit a reading journal, wherein you discuss what you're reading, what you think of those texts, and what you're learning from the texts. I'll look for you to write about what you're reading for class, as well as any outside reading that influences your own writing. For your journal entries, I'd like you to include the following information:

- Date
- Time you started reading
- Time you stopped reading
- Author and title of work(s) you read
- What did you like about **how** the author wrote the piece(s)?
- What did you not like about **how** the author wrote the piece(s)?
- What can you learn about the craft of writing from reading the piece(s)?
- Why do you think Michael assigned the piece(s) for you to read? I'd like you to seriously consider the question, and refrain from sarcastic or glib answers.
- What personal reaction did you have to the piece(s)?
- What questions did you have about the piece(s), and how did try to answer them?
- And finally, feel free to include any other comments you have about the piece(s).

Leading Class Discussions: A couple times (most likely) during the semester, I'd like you and a partner to lead the discussions on the authors. What you do is completely up to you and your partner (creativity is encouraged), but presentations could include a brief biography of the author, other works the author has written, interesting facts, some fact-finding on bewildering details in the piece, and discussion questions to help the class understand and analyze the work from a craft perspective. I'll ask you to meet with me the week before you lead discussion to talk about your presentation.

Participation and Classroom Etiquette: This is not a course in which you can hang back and not say anything. A writing course requires full participation by everyone in order to work, and I make no exceptions for anyone. Please reconsider the course if this bothers you. You cannot make up a missed workshop or presentation. I expect us to have a lot of

fun in this class; however, this is not license to openly disrespect other students or the instructor by reading the *O'Colly* during class time, sleeping, excessive talking that is not related to class, etc. Please turn off cell phones, pagers, and MP3 players before class begins. Also, I expect collegial, tactful, intelligent, honest interaction in this course. I'll put the smackdown on any behavior that discourages learning. Honest grappling with difficult issues and concepts is one thing; personal attacks, thoughtless comments, and unchecked ignorance are completely different. This includes written as well as spoken interaction.

**Grade Breakdown**
Portfolio of representative work: 70%
Reading journal: 15%
Leading discussions on assigned reading: 15%

**Grading policy**
I will not assign grades to individual pieces of creative work. I will evaluate your body of work as whole in your portfolio. In general, though, the outstanding writer who does not miss classes, completes all assignments, and participates well and fully in class has a really good shot at an A; the good or competent writer who attends classes regularly and completes all assignments will probably get a B; the student who misses classes or assignments or whose work shows serious flaws or neglect may receive a C; the student who does not come to class or complete the course work may get lower than a C—however, this a a rare exception as students in creative writing classes are usually eager to participate and enthusiastic about their reading and writing.

**Attendance**
Missing class means that you will miss much of the writing process; therefore, attendance is extremely important and will be reflected in your grade. Three tardies (arriving ten minutes or later after class is scheduled to begin) will equal one absence. Remember that my job is to accurately document your presence or absence. It is not, however, my responsibility to monitor your attendance for you. I will not warn you or nag you if your absences become excessive enough to jeopardize your grade. It is your responsibility to keep abreast of your absences.

You are expected to be present every day your class meets, but I do allow a specific number of absences without penalty. Absences beyond the limit are considered excessive and result in grade reductions. The only absences that do not count toward the total allowed are those taken for mandatory military service and activities required for classes or scholarships. **No other absences will be considered "excused," including absences due to illnesses, doctor's appointments, and emergencies.** Reductions will be taken on a percentage basis from the total number of points possible in the course:

6 absences without automatic grade reduction
7 absences = a final grade reduction of 5%
8 absences = a final grade reduction of 10%
9 absences = a final grade reduction of 15%

10 or more absences = failure of the course.

**Students with Disabilities**
If you believe you have a disability that may affect your performance in the course, have Student Disability Services (315 Student Union) contact me to request appropriate accommodations.

**A Gentle Warning**

This class limits itself to literary fiction, poetry, and drama for an adult, well-read, discriminating audience. Therefore, please do not submit work in a genre (i.e., science fiction, children's literature, Harlequin-type romance, etc.). Also, you may find resistance from me and other members of the class if you write pieces about overdone topics such as perfect love, rainbows, puppies/kittens, or fairy tales.

**A Slightly-Less-Gentle NC-17 Warning**

Our approach to all that we see, read, or discuss will center on its instructive or artistic potential. Since writing has the power to amuse, challenge, and offend, you may be disturbed at various times during the semester by the work we read. Those students who wish to insure against exposure to or discussion of such materials should enroll in another course.

**Format of submitted work**

All work prepared outside of class must be typed in 11-or-12-point Times New Roman font. For prose, use 1-inch margins on all sides, no spaces between paragraphs unless you wish to indicate a section break, and double-space the body of your text. For poetry, single-space your lines. For both prose and poetry, put your name, the date, and the status of your manuscript (1st draft, 2nd revision, etc.) single-spaced in the upper-left hand corner of the first page. I will discuss the format for plays in class. For your packet of representative work, please place your drafts, revisions, and self-assessment in a simple (and inexpensive) two-pocket folder.

**Workshop Guidelines**

- I expect commentary on creative work to be honest, well-read, well-thought-out, insightful, and critical, but constructively critical. Reciprocity is the rule. Give the kind of feedback that you would find most helpful. Tell the writer honestly what works and what does not. Remember, we're here to make each person a better writer. If you tell a fellow writer that the piece is just great and you have no suggestions, I will not be convinced that the piece is perfect; I will believe that you have not thought about it. We cannot get better unless we know what needs work. On the other hand, mean-spirited, personal criticism will probably earn you the same from your classmates.

- When you speak about someone else's work, make every effort to begin with something the author did well.
- You will hear this over and over again, but it is crucial that you learn to respond to writing as a process of deliberate, artistic choices, not as an unmediated transcription of reality. Thus, comments that critique what you infer as the author's source material are of little use. For example: "I don't like these kinds of people." Your job is not to assess the worth or morality of characters, but about how the author uses these qualities to achieve artistic ends. Similarly, defending your work with "But that's how it really happened" doesn't work. Your writing has to carry the justification for its content within itself, not in some real-world event that isn't on the page and therefore doesn't matter.
- Be specific about all your commentary. Comments like "I liked this," "I hated this," or "You use imagery well," are not very helpful. On the other hand, if you say, "The image of the thunderstorm on p. 2 really helped establish a tone of dread," or "I thought the dialogue on p. 3 slowed the pace of the story," the author has better idea of how to make revision choices.
- The author of the work being discussed should refrain from speaking during workshop, if at all possible. I will give the author time after everyone else has finished to respond, clarify, or ask questions. You should listen with an open mind to others' comments, because they might have some very good points, even if they are hard to hear. However, you should also decide for yourself which comments are helpful for revision and which comments you could ignore.
- Commentary on creative work must be both verbal in class, and written on the students' drafts.

**Course Schedule** (this is, of course, subject to change)
CAP—*Contemporary American Poetry*
MSF—*Longman Masters of Short Fiction*

| **Day** | **Assignments** | **Reminders** |
|---|---|---|
| **Jan 9 (M)** | Introduction to class and each other. | |
| **Jan 11 (W)** | Have read Ai, "The Mother's Tale," "Twenty-year Marriage," "Riot Act, April 29, 1992" CAP 3—9. | |
| **Jan 13 (F)** | Continue with Ai/In-class writing. | Jan 17 (T) is the last day to add a course. It is also the last day to drop a course with no fees or grade, or for a 100% refund on withdrawl. |
| **Jan 16 (M)** | No Class—Woo-hoo! | Martin Luther King Day |
| **Jan 18 (W)** | Have read Joyce, "The Dead" MSF 434—464. | |
| **Jan 20 (F)** | Continue with Joyce. | Last day to drop a |

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| | | course with 50% refund. |
| **Jan 23 (M)** | Have read Glaspell, "Trifles" (Blackboard). | |
| **Jan 25 (W)** | Continue with Glaspell/Discussion of stage play format. | |
| **Jan 27 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Jan 30 (M)** | Have read Glück, "The Mirror," "Parable of Flight," "Vespers" CAP 155—160. | |
| **Feb 1 (W)** | Continue with Glück/Workshop. | |
| **Feb 3 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Feb 6 (M)** | Have read Baldwin, "Sonny's Blues" MSF 27—49. | |
| **Feb 8 (W)** | Continue with Baldwin/Workshop. | |
| **Feb 10 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Feb 13 (M)** | Have read Strand, "The Guest of Honor" (Blackboard). | |
| **Feb 15 (W)** | Continue with Strand/Workshop. | |
| **Feb 17 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Feb 20 (M)** | Have read Soto, "Black Hair," "Oranges," "The Tale of Sunlight," "Failing in the Presence of Ants" CAP 483—489. | |
| **Feb 22 (W)** | Continue with Soto/Workshop. | |
| **Feb 24 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Feb 27 (M)** | Have read Mason, "Shiloh" MSF 578—588. | |
| **Mar 1 (W)** | Continue with Mason/Workshop. | |
| **Mar 3 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Mar 6 (M)** | Have read Price, "That Midnight Rodeo" (Blackboard). | |
| **Mar 8 (W)** | Continue with Price/Workshop. | |
| **Mar 10 (F)** | **Hand in your Reading Journal.** Workshop. | |
| **Mar 13 (M)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Spring Break |
| **Mar 15 (W)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Spring Break |
| **Mar 17 (F)** | No Class—Woo-Hoo! | Spring Break |
| **Mar 20 (M)** | Have read Levertov, "The Acolyte," "The Poem Unwritten," "The Mutes," "Life at War" CAP 299—305. | |
| **Mar 22 (W)** | Continue with Levertov/Workshop. | |
| **Mar 24 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **Mar 27 (M)** | Have read Leavitt, "Territory" (Blackboard). | |
| **Mar 29 (W)** | Continue with Leavitt/Workshop. | |
| **Mar 31 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **April 3 (M)** | Screening: *Law and Order*. Meet in Morrill 305. | |
| **April 5 (W)** | Workshop. | |

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|---|---|---|
| **April 7 (F)** | Workshop. | Last day to drop a course (grade of "W")<br>Last day to withdraw from all courses with automatic "W" |
| **April 10 (M)** | Have read Hopkins, “The Sea and the Skylark,” “In the Valley of the Elwy,” “The Windhover: to Christ our Lord,” “Pied Beauty” (Blackboard). | |
| **April 12 (W)** | Continue with Hopkins/Workshop. | |
| **April 14 (F)** | Workshop. | |
| **April 17 (M)** | Have read Erdrich, “A Wedge of Shade” (Blackboard). | |
| **April 19 (W)** | Continue with Erdrich/Workshop. | |
| **April 21 (F)** | Workshop. | Last day to withdraw from all courses with assigned "W" or "F" |
| **April 24 (M)** | Workshop. | Pre-finals week |
| **April 26 (W)** | Workshop. | Pre-finals week |
| **April 28 (F)** | Wrap-up with workshop and questions about portfolio. | Pre-finals week |
| **Finals** | Your portfolio is due by 3:00 p.m. on Friday, May 5th. | |

# Appendix E—Questionnaires for ENGL 2513

**Literacy Narrative Questionnaire**

*On another sheet of paper, please type your responses to the following questions:*

What level of education have your family members (parents, grandparents, older siblings) attained? How does that affect how you view reading, writing, and learning?

What's your first memory of reading? How old were you? Why is the memory so unforgettable? What did this experience mean to you at the time?

What are your earliest memories of direct or indirect instruction in writing/reading before you started school?

What memories do you have of learning to read and write in elementary school?

What reading and writing have you done with peers or friends? What reading and writing are you doing now with peers or friends?

What reading and writing do you do outside of school?

Who was most influential in how you learned to read/write?

What were the most influential events in how you learned to read and write?

Think of all the different kinds of reading/writing you've done in the past six months (all decoding of texts—e-mail, text messaging, magazines, billboards, novels, bus schedules, school reading, etc.) Which of these activities are literate? Why do you think so?

Why are you pursuing your education? What do you want to get out of it?

What do you want to get out of your English classes?

How is important is reading and writing in your life? What values do you place on reading and writing?

How do you use reading and writing? What purposes do they serve?

How would you describe what your reading life? What's your relationship to reading? How has that relationship changed throughout your life? Do you like reading? Why or why not? What does reading mean to you now? What do you love to read? Why? What do you tend to read, and is that different from what you love to read? Why or why not?

**End of Semester Reflective Questionnaire**

*Please type your responses to these questions on another sheet of paper*:

In what ways have your attitudes and beliefs toward the kinds of literature we've been reading changed over the semester?

What role did the reading journals play in your attitudes and beliefs toward the reading we've done? Why do you think so?

What role did our class discussions have on your literacy attitudes or beliefs?

How have your attitudes toward reading and writing changed since you wrote your literacy narrative?

VITA

Max Michael McCamley

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Thesis: WHAT WE WRITE ABOUT WHEN WE WRITE ABOUT LITERACY: IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY, AND CULTURE IN COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOMS

Major Field: English

Biographical:

Personal Data: Born in Valentine, Nebraska, on July 19, 1970, the son of William McCamley and Janice Fetherston McGinn.

Education: Graduated from Lincoln Southeast High School in Lincoln, Nebraska in June 1989; received Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in December 1994; received Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing from the University of Arizona in May 1997; completed the requirements for Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at Oklahoma State University in July 2007.

Experience: Employed at the University of Nebraska Press and the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services before commencing doctoral coursework; employed at Oklahoma State University as a Graduate Teaching Associate from 2001 to the present.

Professional Memberships: National Council of Teachers of English, Council of Writing Program Administrators, Association of Teachers of Technical Writing, Modern Language Association.

Name: Max Michael McCamley Date of Degree: July, 2007

Institution: Oklahoma State University Location: Stillwater, Oklahoma

Title of Study: WHAT WE WRITE ABOUT WHEN WE WRITE ABOUT LITERACY: IDENTITY, IDEOLOGY, AND CULTURE IN COLLEGE WRITING CLASSROOMS

Pages in Study: 273 Candidate for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major Field: English

Scope and Method of Study: This study examines the writing of 30 students in two writing classes at Oklahoma State University to determine the cultural forces behind their literacy practices.

Findings and Conclusions: For the first-year writing students, parents and family stand out as the predominant literacy sponsors for these students, but very few teachers do. In addition, the questionnaires were often more revealing than the literacy narratives in essay form. In fact, the students consciously constructed the narratives to establish often archetypal identities for themselves as devotees of literacy. The students' writing reveals a remarkable rhetorical dexterity and ideological flexibility as they interrogate and challenge beliefs, attitudes, and ideologies about literacy while still professing their allegiance to it. The creative writing students' memories confirm many of the sponsorship and literacy accumulations of the first-year writing students, but they also reveal the compulsions many students feel to compartmentalize and prioritize their literacy choices through a complex method of resource allocation. The students' reading journals revealed an intricate accession and resistance to the disciplinary motivations of the assignment. While some students used the journals to learn how to "read like a writer," many students also used the journal to further their cultural literacy, and still others harnessed the journals and their reading to investigate issues from their lives of particular import to them. This research suggests that if educators are "conflicted brokers" of literacy, then students are conflicted buyers, and these conflicts need to be addressed so that real literacy learning can take place. I conclude the study by suggesting its implications for teaching and proposing new avenues of research.

ADVISER'S APPROVAL: Richard Batteiger