BEGINNINGS: MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES

For English Teachers At All Levels
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Contents of This Issue

BEGINNINGS:  MOTIVATIONAL TECHNIQUES

An Early Start in Creative Writing
Carol Mattison Krahm, Indian Hill School, River Hills

Launch Pads:  Ways to Stimulate Creative Thinking
Donovan R. Walling, Farnsworth Jr. High School, Sheboygan

Starting At The Beginning in Teaching Composition
Ron Schreier, Fond du Lac Schools

A Beginning For Developmental English
William T. Lawlor, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

Wisconsin Authors--A Beginning and an End
Jean H. O'Neill, Menomonie Jr. High School

The First Course in Literature at the College Level
Joseph Schwartz, Marquette University, Milwaukee

The Introduction to Literature Course
At UW-Madison, Todd K. Bender
At UW-Eau Claire, Doug Pearson
At UW-Platteville, George R. Mahoney
At UW-River Falls, Richard Beckham
At UW-Stevens Point, Hazel M. Koskenlinna

Non-Major Literature:  Combating the Decline
Sue B. Beckham, University of Wisconsin-Stout, Menomonie

Two Poems
a continual celebration of my grandparents
Mark Bruner, Wausau
Renewal
Dorothy M. Jordak, Milwaukee

Books for Children and Adolescents
Linda Western, Betty Pelto, Mary Jett-Simpson, Susan L. Steiner, Richard Western

Books for Teachers
Mary K. Croft

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AN EARLY START IN CREATIVE WRITING

CAROL MATTISON KRAHN
Indian Hill School, River Hills

It was 6:30 sharp. I was getting my ticket to China on a Boeing 747. After I got my ticket, I walked into a coffee shop. I was in a hurry so I just ordered a cup of coffee. When I finished, I ran, because if I didn't, I would miss my plane. Well, I made the plane O.K., but I had a strange feeling all through the flight as if something was going to happen. All of a sudden, all the passengers were gasping for their breath. The plane was spiraling at great speed straight down toward the Atlantic Ocean.

Is this the beginning of a T.V. thriller? A new paperback? No. It is the beginning of a story written by a third grade boy who was so turned on to his story that he carried it around in his pocket back and forth to school for three days until it was completed. This is the kind of story that needed no urging to finish, that the other children begged to read, that gave a warm glow of authorship to its creator. This is the kind of excitement in writing that we as teachers strive to achieve. This is the kind of excitement often found at Indian Hill School, where I have been teaching for some time.

In our individualized school, creative writing begins in K and continues through third grade, the top grade in the building. The writing done by the children is much emphasized and prized. Our principal, Alice Johnson, follows the writing progress of each child. One of the most important ways that this is done is by establishing a creative writing folder for each child when s/he begins school. By looking into these folders which contain several writing samples taken throughout each year the principal, teachers, parents, and child can see the progress made each year, noting continuing problems, either mechanical or in the use of language arts in the classroom include: written and oral communication, skills in the use of the language, learning the joy of communicating with others by gripping the attention and imagination of fellow classmates. Most of all, it is the use of words, words, words! It is apparent that there are two areas in language to be considered: sending and receiving. The bird sings, the baby cries, the dog barks, the child talks.

It is with this last aspect that we as teachers of English are most concerned. As the child talks, becoming more mature in sending his message, he moves from sounds to words to phrases to sentences. At this point the classroom teacher becomes involved. The child is beginning to find a need to preserve his ideas, not to lose them. His first contact with written language may be his own name, written laboriously, haphazardly on his own paper. From this start may well come the Roald Dahl, the Shakespeare, the reporter, or the writer of letters.

Our mandate as teachers is to make this early start as rewarding and exciting as possible so that our beginning writer does not falter along the way. The child has to learn to love the language, to roll the sounds of words on his tongue, to relish the perfect word to describe his beloved grubby puppy, to find satisfaction in alliteration, rhyming, nonsense and sense syllables.

Writing in the Kindergarten

Many of our children come to the K program with a strong background in language from home, from the playground, from T.V., from records. They have a lot to say! Often a child talks to himself as he is experiencing something, telling himself to take one step at a time as he is going up the slide, "Now put a foot on the step, now sit down, now push off." Then he yells all the way down the slide and starts over again. The K teacher observing this will write down some of the words and share them with the child later.

Oh, boy!
Here I go!
I put my feet on the steps.
Up I go!
Whoooooooo!!

This is action-to-language-to-story, a real situation. This story, written down by an adult, may be illustrated by the child. After it has been read to him a few times, he may share it with others, take it home, or put it in a class book. This was informal dictation, the child not even aware of the process.

After a time, the child may have a story he wishes to dictate. This is the golden, the teachable moment. Be prepared with pencil and paper always. Grab them and start to write. This is no little feat. How can you do it? Find all the help you can: student teachers, parents who wander by, aides, the principal, third grade students, anyone who can write!

Later, set up a dictating station with a tape recorder and a microphone. Show the children how to use the equipment, set up the ground rules, and away they go! The story can be typed or played back for the child or the whole class. This is all part of making the transition from spoken to written language.

More formal, planned situations abound as the year goes on. A sentence starter may be used: I made a ---. I am best at ---. I like --- because ---. The teacher writes the starter; the child dictates the ending. After the sentence or sentences have been written, the child goes off to illustrate the story. He may dictate a story in the content area after viewing a film or actually watching a butterfly emerge from his cocoon. Letters are dictated to an absent classmate, to a speaker, to a birthday child. There is much satisfaction in these activities. A child can see his ideas written down, hear them read back to him, see that his thoughts are important and worth preserving.

My name is Mike. I like to shovel with my dad. Sometimes I'm bad because I don't listen to my mom. My dad makes noodles. He's getting sick and tired of seeing other men work at the wrong place. They don't listen to my dad. I love all my friends. by Mike, K

As a third grader Mike read this autobiography he had dictated in kindergarten. He was delighted, saying that many of the things were still true. He still didn't listen to his mom; the men still didn't listen to his dad! He had a really warm feeling about reviewing his early story. This is one of the great advantages of maintaining a story folder for each child.

Other kindergarten opportunities present themselves as the year progresses. The teacher, alert to language situations, will write down a few sentences from Show and Tell to take home that very day. A tape will be made of a child's description of a caterpillar. The story will be written
on a little card, reenforcing the spoken word with the written. The story and tape are available for the child to hear. A little library of such tapes and stories can be built.

Writing in the First Grade

Delightful things happen in the first grade where children are immersed in an ever opening world of words and ideas. Often the most exciting motivations come from sharing books with children. For example, read Hailstones and Halibut Bones by Mary O'Neill, a wonderful book of poetry defining color in imaginative ways. After hearing this book, first graders created their own book of color definitions.

Orange is fire flames. Green is the sea when it's rough. Red makes me feel hot in the summer. Blue is a new pair of blue jeans. Yellow is a bright feeling. Purple is delicious grape jelly.

Be prepared for the book coming from home. Always read it quickly or you may find yourself having to delete or rephrase as you read. However, even though the book may not be "literature" it may spark a story idea. One first grader brought a Whitman Publishing Pillow Book entitled Guess What I Have?. This is a story of a child and a long rope. The reader has to guess what is at the end of the rope. The mystery continues throughout the book. The last page shows the rope is attached to a whole barnyard full of animals. The first graders wrote stories with a rope passing from the cover page to the inside of the story. Imagine the fun of sharing these riddles, having classmates guess with "no peeking," a vivid language experience incorporating listening, writing, reading, discussing, with the pride of authorship!

A more elaborate experience came out of reading The March Wind by Inez Rice. This story tells of a little boy who found a shapeless old hat and put it on. When he did so, he became all sorts of wonderful things: a soldier, cowboy, bandit. Finally, the March Wind came and claimed the hat. The little boy was frightened at first, then laughed at his wonderful adventure. The first graders made hats of their own, marvelous crepe paper creations, heavy with paste. Then they imagined what would happen if they wore these hats. Lovely stories and pictures emerged from this experience.

Dictation continues with the need to recruit other helpers, even capable first graders! Notice the imagery in Jodi's story. If she had had to write it at this early age, the language would have been far simpler. However, dictating freed her to use her extensive oral vocabulary.

When I Saw That Ant

One day, I was walking in my house and I looked down. I saw an ant. The ant's feet were thin as toothpicks. His eyes were as big as soda cap tops. His body was as big as a giant candy cane. He was black and had white stripes. On his stomach it was different colors. He tried to lift me by himself. I woke up and it was all a dream.

What lovely language, utilizing the similes "as thin as toothpicks," "as big as soda cap tops." This is surely written from the viewpoint of a child using the objects in her environment.

Vivid lives go on in the minds of a little first grader; you will find violence, imagination, beauty, dreams. How wonderful to be able to reach and unlock these thoughts! Often you will gain insight into the homelife of a child. Consider the story written by Martha.

Once there was a dinosaur. There was a little girl who found the dinosaur. She kept him. She tried to put him in the room with her sister!

Once a story is completed, as a first step, what happens then? We believe that right from the beginning, the idea of form is important. If a child is to write a story for someone else to read, the story must be readable. Therefore, once a story is completed, the second step is traditionally rearranging or correcting the way the ideas look on paper. We try to avoid having a child routinely recopy a story. This is such a turnoff to a glorious, far ranging story. Have a one-to-one conference with each child at some point during the day, or ask a mom, student teacher, or another child to do it. Discuss and teach on the spot the important corrections needed: periods, capital letters, spelling. NEVER red pencil a story; this is defacing the child's work. I use a little pink correction sheet for any notes to be written.

In Dr. John Stewig's book, Read to Write, there is an excellent chapter on "Reshaping Writing." In this, he uses reshaping in place of the more traditional editing, stressing that this process involves modification of thought, not mechanical editing. This can be undertaken in such a way as to be enjoyable, stepping back and taking a long thoughtful look at a writing product, seeing if it can be enhanced in any way. This can be difficult for a child, to be objective about his own creation. He must be helped by a tactful, noncritical teacher who can sense when it is enough!

Writing in the Second Grade

By second grade, writing moves into another dimension; the child has achieved some degree of independence in mechanical skills, is more confident in his ability to express himself, has a wider background of experience and information on which to draw.

The children continue their dictionaries begun in first grade. They add words as needed so as to have a personal reference available. They also have started to use a simple, beginning dictionary. If, however, the child still needs help in spelling a word, he must follow an inflexible rule. He may not ask, "How do you spell famous?" He must instead ask, "Do you spell it F-A-M-E-S?" Then a word helper will complete the word. Often the child is delighted to find that he could spell all or most of the word all by himself.

Sometimes a common theme is supplied, such as writing on a topic covered in science or social studies. Then a word list may be dictated or put on the board. Story starters are still useful: If I were an animal---, If I was walking in the woods---, I would like to invite my favorite character to my house---. Monster stories are great fun! Second graders like to be scary in a very secure setting.

The Mystery of the Monster

Long ago in an old castle lived a great scientist who wanted to invent a monster. So he went to see what he could do. He thought that he needed a brain, so he got a chicken's brain and put it in.

Then he put in a fish's mouth and it looked terrible. But what do you expect a monster to look like? Then he took some dog's eyes and that looked even worse! Then he took an elephant's body and that looked very strong! Then he took a frog's nose and that looked very queer! He took some hippopotamus ears and that looked horrible!

Finally he put some normal arms on. That was good. Then he put some normal legs on. But something was wrong. So he took out the brain and put in a normal brain and the monster was done. The great scientist had become a famous scientist with his monster.

by Nancy

I have been fortunate to work with Dr. John Stewig, a director of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English and a Professor of Curriculum at UW-Milwaukee. Dr. Stewig used our school as a testing ground when writing his Read to Write, a book which should be read by anyone seeking a literature approach to writing with young children.
This second grader had some fine elements in her story. She set the stage with the scientist and his castle. Then through a series of parallel events, the monster was created. The ending was satisfying, with all the work being rewarded by the fame of the scientist.

Some children take to imaginative writing with great joy, developing interesting stories. Ricky is one of these fortunate children.

"Tra-la, I'm a leprechaun and I'm happy," sang Barry Baldwin, the King of the Leprechauns. He said he was happy, but he was not. Deep inside him, he was thinking of the catastrophe that happened yesterday. A lad stole the pot of gold. It was not nice of him. He was wondering how he got over the rainbow. He called a meeting between the leprechauns. There were zillions of leprechauns. All of a sudden the pot of gold walked in. Everyone jumped on him and had a fight. He got killed.

Now this was a great story in Ricky's folder. I plan to go over it with him this year from the vantage point of a third grader to see if he can clear up the ending. I'm not sure who got killed. However, if a child has written a story such as this in the early grades, I think it wiser not to be too precise in criticism. Obviously written expression is this little boy's specialty.

To continue the idea of using literature to motivate writing, many teachers have used the appealing Judith Viorst book, Alexander and the Terrible, No Good, Very Bad Day. Since we all have had such days, it is great fun to write a personal version of such a day. The teacher might want to do this, too!

Writing in the Third Grade

Motivation is still the key to creative writing. In my third grade, I usually gather the children around me on the floor. We talk and talk and and sometimes read. Often neat words or phrases come up. I immediately put them on the board. At this brainstorming session one idea sparks another. When the feelings are strong and many want to speak and interrupt each other, this is the moment. "Write your ideas down and we can all share them later." For a time, the only sound is that of a scratching pencil.

Then the questions begin. "Do you spell because b-e-c-k-a?" Each child has his dictionary started in earlier grades or a scrap of paper on which to write the new word. Many children hoard these words to use when developing their personal spelling lists. This independence is much treasured by child and teacher alike and must be encouraged.

Often a story will take several days to complete. The first day may be spent in motivation, the second and even third days may be spent in writing, the fourth day in proofreading and possibly editing. Here is the time table for one such story using literature. (See suggestions in Read to Write, "Understanding the Oral Tradition").

I read the classic tale of The Gingerbread Boy. The next day I read The One Bannock and The Clay Pot Boy. We discussed the similarities and differences in these old tales. We also discussed the idea of personification of inanimate objects. We discussed the difference between living and nonliving, establishing life as including movement, growth, need for water, food, oxygen. Then I assigned homework. "Go home and look around your own room or some special room in your house. Find something that you would like to bring to life. Think about what might happen." The next day we were back on the floor again. Among the objects so honored were a bear, a jack pot bank, a drag racer, a toy cat. Of course, stuffed animals were very popular. There was a side discussion of who sleeps with a stuffed toy. Everyone was relaxed about this and good discussion ensued.

We continued talking (we do a lot of that!). I led them into the idea of paragraphing by a discussion of the three parts needed for this story. In the first paragraph, it is necessary to set up the situation. This paragraph will tell what the object is, describe it, tell where it lives and what it looks like. In paragraph two, something must happen to bring the object to life. How did this happen? Make sure it is a good adventure. This may take more than one paragraph. However, in third grade paragraphs tend to be rather arbitrary. In paragraph three, something has to happen to end the adventure. Does the object return to its normal state? Does it remain alive? How did this affect the owner of the object?

The Bear

One morning, my mother told me to clean my room. So I cleaned and cleaned until everything was spotless. In the middle of my room in a pile of stuffed animals sat a large stuffed bear. I picked it up and put it on my bed.

It said... "Hello!" I said "Hello! I turned my head around and asked. "Who said that?" He said, "Me, on the bed." "What?" I asked. "You?" I asked. "Yes," he said. "You can't talk, can you?" I asked. "Yes, you made me come to life," he said. "How did I make you come to life?" I asked. "You put me on top of some magic dust!" he said.

Just then, something shook me. I woke up. It was my mother. It was just a dream after all. Then my mother said, "Clean your room!"

and it started all over again!

Incidentally, this is unusual in a story by a young writer. The third paragraph was rather typical. "It was just a dream." But then there was the delightful and unexpected touch of "Clean your room, and it started all over again!"

Many other stories emerged from this assignment. Several children finished the story in one day, others took longer, much longer! The room was alive with excitement and words were flying all over. The children were spontaneously sharing with each other, laughing and talking. It was a very busy, happy productive kind of chaos!

As each story was finished, an adult met to discuss the story with the child: the teacher, student teacher, aide, a helping mother. The points of discussion were as follows:

1. Did the story follow the assignment?
2. Were there three parts: setting the scene, coming to life with an adventure, a good ending?

Since the children were still excited about these stories, we took it a step further into the personification of food. What would happen if your favorite food would come to life when you are in a fast food restaurant? In paragraph one, order the food. In paragraph two, the food comes to life. In paragraph three the food returns to normal or some other ending.

Children respond to poetry at all ages, from the first delightful at "Patty Cake, Patty Cake, Baker's Man" through Robert Louis Stevenson, jump rope rhymes, rollicking tales told in poetry form. There are many ideas for working with children in writing poetry. (See "Poetry, a Solution to a Problem" in Read to Write). Not all poetry has to be rhymed. If the
child tries to force a rhyme, the poetry will be stilted. Syllabic forms of poetry are very appealing to third graders. As soon as they are aware of the beat or syllabication of a word, they are preparing to write in one of these forms. If they do not know the rules of syllabication, teach them a chin check! Put your hand on your chin. When it wiggles, a new syllable is started. Try it! Say POETRY, HIPPOPOTAMUS. How many times did your chin wiggle? Try this with your name. Make lists or words with 2, 3, 4 syllables. Enjoy beating out the words with your hands, tapping them with your feet.

When the children are comfortable with the idea of syllables, then it is time to start the syllabic poetry. Perhaps the best known form is
HAIRY. I put this on a large chart:

- 5 Syllables
- 7 Syllables
- 5 Syllables

Usually we write some class poems first, with everyone contributing ideas. Then the children are ready to try it on their own. You may get poems such as these:

Oh, how the trees dance
So finely in the breeze on
A nice summer day.

Oh, tarantula,
You super big louse
In someone's house!

The children will turn out many of these poems. Often I will find them on my desk in the morning. All subjects will be covered. Not every poem is about a beautiful subject. These are great fun, short, and easy to do. After a time, this loses its appeal and I then introduce the CINQUAIN:

- 2 Syllables
- 4 Syllables
- 6 Syllables
- 8 Syllables
- 2 Syllables

We gather on the floor, discuss the fun we have had with poetry, make lists or words learned in social studies. We have been studying Thailand, Alaska, deserts. Some exceptionally lovely poetry evolved:

**Thailand**

- I see the rain, kites and
- floating markets pass by.
- Boats, Bangkok, and sunshine all at
- Thailand.

A more involved form is that of DIAMANTE developed by Iril M. Tiedt:

- I word noun
- 2 words adjectives
- 3 words participles (-ing, -ed)
- 4 words nouns related to the first noun
- 3 words participles
- 2 words adjectives
- 1 word noun (opposite of first word)

**Desert**

- I see the drifting dunes
- the Arabs and shepherds.
- The campsite is beautiful.
- Desert.

Summary

These, then, are my suggestions for an early start in creative writing. Keep some of these guidelines in mind:

1. Establish and maintain a record of the child's writing progress to be shared with teachers, parents, and the child.
2. Respect the child's dignity in his early efforts to written self expression, expecting his realistic best but not being accepting of his efforts.
3. Utilize all the help you can to have someone to record a story on the spot.
4. Set the scene for independence by early teaching of needed skills: spelling, punctuation, responding to words.
5. Establish procedures for correction and editing of work.
7. Communicate with the children your interest and excitement over their achievements. Help them to realize that talking to a piece of paper with a pencil is one of the most exciting and rewarding of creative human activities, encouraging it to the highest degree.

**Bibliography**

- Teachers' Guide
LAUNCH PADS: 6 WAYS TO STIMULATE CREATIVE THINKING

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The hardest thing in writing is to begin, or so it would seem. Coming up with the right idea, the interesting approach—ah, there’s the rub, not just for professional writers (who have filled volumes discussing this very problem) but for students as well. It becomes a challenge, therefore, to every teacher to go beyond simply making a writing assignment. The effective teacher needs also to “launch” students into that assignment, whether it be creative writing, factual writing, or even research. To this end, the following “launch pads” are offered.

“Imagination is more important than knowledge,” stated Albert Einstein. Stimulating the mind to creative imaginings allows the student to use knowledge in interesting and innovative ways. So, what better way is there to begin than with the launch pad called Invention.

1. Invention

How might people or cities exist under the Great Lakes?
What if the South had won the Civil War?

Invention prods students to apply their ingenuity to develop new ideas and create new devices, or to rewrite history, re-invent something making it better, more colorful, more useful, more...anything.

Invention problems often take the form of “What if” questions, such as, “What if southern California fell into the ocean?” Students mulling over this problem might explore topics as broad as human emotions and reactions in the nation, natural resources, ecology, the country’s morale, strategic defenses in a time of disaster, and many others. The problem could be dealt with factually or from the standpoint of fiction.

There is a whole series of children’s stories using this type of invention as a basis. You may recall tales of “How the Leopard Got His Spots” and “How the Camel Got His Hump” from Rudyard Kipling’s Just So Stories.

Television gets into the act too. A recent rewriting of history example was the fictional drama focusing on a trial of Lee Harvey Oswald, murdered assassin of President John Kennedy.

One way of utilizing the invention launch pad (and the others that follow) is through group effort or brainstorming. In brainstorming, the goal is to bring out as many ideas as possible starting from a single issue or question. The activity takes place in groups of 3-6 students, one of whom can act as chairman and recorder. This person keeps the group on target and jots down the ideas expressed. With younger groups, this task may be shared by two students.

To be effective, brainstorming must take place in a “no fault” atmosphere; that is, no idea is too far-out or silly to be considered. As students warm up to this type of activity, it becomes an excellent vehicle for charging the creative current.

2. Word Sets

- photo of pretty girl
- broken teacup
- red rose
- open window

What kind of story could the words above tell? Using random sets of unrelated words stimulates students to think in highly individualistic ways. Some stories will be serious, some sad, some funny. Everything depends upon allowing each student to look at the word set in his or her own special way.

Of course, not all word sets should contain nouns as the one above does. Students can take their spelling lists for the week and develop stories. And, word sets may vary greatly in the number of terms. The main constraint in this launch pad is that every word in the set must find a place in the story, not merely a few chosen words. This limitation forces students to expand their thinking, so that every word will “fit.”

3. Symbolic Stories

What does the sun think as it sets? OR Tell a story of conflict using trees instead of people.

Sound like strange instructions, don’t they? Symbolic stories take students out of the real world into the surreal world of what Willy Wonka sang about as “pure imagination.” They allow students to explore human feelings and sensations from new and startling vantage points. At the same time, symbolic stories invariably lead to consideration of several literary techniques which the teacher can bring out in subsequent discussion: personification, plot, mood, tone, point of view, setting, characterization.

4. Sensations

Stimulating the senses can also generate imaginative thinking. One visual stimulator that has been extensively used in writing projects such as the Ztrap, Zook, and Write! series (Bantam) is showing uncaptioned photographs. Students use their creative powers to develop captions and whole stories centering around their impressions concerning the subjects of the photos.

Simpler than photographs, but equally stimulating, is the use of random shapes cut from construction paper, ink blots, patterns of circles, dots, and so on. Remember lying on your back in an open field as a youngster and trying to imagine what shape the clouds formed. This one was an eagle, that other a sailing ship of old. The same process used in the classroom can be an effective launch pad to creative thinking.

Don’t stop at visual sensations, however. Explore the whole range of the senses. Examine mysterious sounds (tape recorded on your own or commercially produced). Trap an intriguing smell in a bottle and pass it around the classroom. Construct a “feely” box into which students cannot see but can stick their hands to feel “something” -- e.g. wet fur, an interesting cone or seed pot, cold spaghetti, etc.

Sense exploration is a personal favorite as a launch pad, and one I’ve spent considerable time developing and using. Such exploration lends itself to so many activities which are highly stimulating, particularly with younger students of the middle school and junior high school age group.
5. Questioning

Raising creative questions is in itself as important as attempting to find or create answers. Questioning arises from the introduction of a topic, and the procedure is most stimulating when used in a brainstorming group. Take the topic of sunspots. What questions can be asked about sunspots? Here are some sample responses:

What are sunspots?
What causes them?
What do they look like? Are they really spots?
How do scientists discover them?
Do they affect the earth's weather?
Do they cause people to go crazy?
What if sunspots were responsible for werewolves?

The questioning process tends to lead to other launch pads to find answers which can be expressed in various forms of writing. It is readily apparent that this writing could be fictional or factual depending upon the constraints of the particular assignment.

6. Problem Making

Problem Making is really an advanced form of Questioning. The mystery writer is a perfect example of a problem maker.

Students find problem making exciting and challenging, especially since it can take many forms: suspense and mystery writing, creating games and puzzles, and theorizing of all sorts. Like the questioning activity, problem making leads to other launch pads because puzzles naturally spur students to seek solutions.

When the idea first occurred to me to put together this set of six launch pads, I was tempted to limit my own thinking to creative writing. Then the thought struck me: isn't all writing essentially creative? Even the driest research project stems from some creative desire to find new knowledge or at least to bring together information in a new way. So, with this notion firmly in mind, it is important to urge that the launch pads described above are not the sole resource of the writing teacher. Rather, they can be used by teachers in almost every discipline as a means of stimulating creative thinking.

Two other points should be readily apparent. First, this set of launch pads is by no means exhaustive and, second, the six activities described are only sketchily presented. Certainly, there are many ways to stimulate students to think creatively, and the six activities presented here can be used in many forms and for a variety of subjects and purposes. It is hoped that this material will stimulate teachers to think creatively about how they can stimulate similar imaginative thought in their students.

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1See "Sense Exploration into Media: An Introduction" in Audiovisual Instruction (supplement), October 1974.
STARTING AT THE BEGINNING IN TEACHING COMPOSITION

RON SCHREIER
Fond du Lac Schools

It is now well past the time for expressions of concern over the declining ability of students in our schools to express themselves in written composition, and it is time we as teachers act... by starting at the beginning in teaching composition. Far too many young people already have passed through schools who were no better writers upon completing school than they were at points much earlier in their education. The reasons for such are numerous -- ill-equipped instructors, uninterested students, non-chalant publics, emphasis on spoken communication, to mention a few, but one factor stands out in my mind as being a most probable cause for such writing deficiency, that being the lack of instructional assistance provided students in the approach to handling composition topics.

There seems no clearer explanation for the obvious inability of students with their many creative thoughts and ideas on so many subjects to channel and convey these thoughts from mind to paper than a lack of composition approach know how. For those of us who know the agony of trying to decide where to begin some seemingly boundless task for which we have so much substance to contribute once past the 'getting going point,' we can more easily recognize the frustration that besets young people who are repeatedly given composition writing assignments, with little if any direction provided for getting started - approaching the composition topic.

Effective composition writing can result only if young writers are taught how to approach, limit and manage the topics they are expected to deal with. Too little instructional guidance in this regard can only serve to frustrate youth who are in search of an outlet that adequately represents the manner in which their ideas are experienced. A similar principle would seem to apply in building a house. Who could even imagine attempting to build a home without careful, detailed, step-by-step planning. In similar respects, students should not be expected to build effective compositions without specific plans for approaching and then building such constructions. This blueprint represents a planning process which starts with the whole subject and then limits it according to the various factors which must be taken into consideration to suit the means of the builder. Such a plan of approach is essential to the creation of sound, comprehensive, well-built construction.

Let's start at the beginning from the point of subject selection, on through the process of subject limitation, selection of topic ideas, and the related means of developing these ideas. Secondly, teachers must stop assuming that students can write compositions just because they know and can even demonstrate some proficiency regarding the concepts of word, sentence and paragraph. Effective words, effective sentences, and effective paragraphs do not automatically make for effective composition. Thirdly, let's place much more emphasis on the need, before writing of thinking about and making judgments about the scope of the topic to be used for writing. Assignments for example to write compositions on 'Russia', or 'Trees', or 'Winter', to mention but a few, have scopes far too broad to be dealt with.

In the limited framework of written compositions and thus should not be given students, or should be given only if students have been thoroughly trained in the treatment of such broad subjects. How quickly and successfully such broad topic assignments in the hands of unskilled writers serve to undo all the important concepts previously learned concerning paragraphs and their correct development.

Think about the subject and decide whether or not it is too broad. Here is an example using 'trees' as a possible subject. If subject is too broad, break it down so that it can be handled properly in a composition.

Possible breakdown areas:

- Kinds of trees
- Favorite trees
- Trees of Wisconsin
- Life cycle of trees
- Beauty of trees
- Tree leaves
- Making trees into lumber
- Tree diseases
- How trees get destroyed
- Trees are a help
- Best trees for lumber
- How kids use trees
- Things written about trees
- Things built from trees
- Trees can be dangerous
- Christmas trees
- Tree trimming and cutting
- Planting and caring for trees
- Different trees for different countries
- If trees could talk
- Trees of the U.S.A.
- Trees of Wisconsin
- What trees are made of
- Uses of trees

Let's take this last one. Think about this subject and put down the different ideas that come to mind that relate to the subject, and that could further be explained. List these ideas and try to do so as complete sentences. Examples:

1. Trees are often used for enjoyment.
2. One of the main uses of trees is to build buildings.
3. Many of our house and school furnishings come from trees.
4. Some trees are used for special times of the year.

After listing as many different ideas relating to the subject as you can, review them, sort them, combine some if appropriate, omit some - and finally when you have left what is desired put these ideas in some orderly arrangement.

Now you're ready to write and each one of these arranged ideas can serve as topic sentences to be further developed into paragraphs. Indent, write down ideas to others in the clarity with which they do so. Once each of the topic ideas have been dealt with, an introductory, and a concluding paragraph can be written. Finally, once the theme has been written, review it, and select an appropriate title to be placed at the top of the paper.

It is unfortunate that many would-be good writers are led to frustration about writing before they have even begun the task. Students of all ages and abilities generally have an abundance of "good" ideas that they are eager to express to others in the clarity with which they do so. As teachers, we owe these students the means for making the transfer of thoughts from mind to paper as manageable as possible. Instead of stifling the expressive inclinations of youth, we must strive to facilitate matters for them by providing the proper means for selecting, developing and channelling their thoughts into meaningful expression. It must be the teacher's goal to foster and develop students' feelings of self-confidence in their own abilities to respond appropriately to the topics to be dealt with. It is this initial process in composition, of accepting, treating, and adjusting the topics to fit student manageability that needs to be taught, stressed and re-taught whenever appropriate and at various
writing and learning levels as well. Only then can such topics be properly managed by students using two or three topic sentence outlets for developed response to the narrowed subjects.

In further attempting to teach quality composition writing, it must be stressed that quality in writing is not measured by the students’ ability to write all that they can about a given topic, but that it is measured by their ability to take two or three selected, main ideas relative to the narrowed topic and to develop these ideas through concrete, interesting and specific means as fully as possible. Realization must be reached that composition writing is an art that must be taught before it can be learned. Just as a child isn’t expected to read without appropriately being prepared to do so, the student cannot be expected to write effective composition without previously being taught the fundamental components of that specific skill either. As teachers, we must start now in helping students in their plight toward orderly and meaningful, well-written composition, and the place to start...right at the beginning.

A BEGINNING FOR DEVELOPMENTAL ENGLISH

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The curriculum for developmental English usually focuses on the construction and development of sentences and paragraphs. Some students do not possess the writing skills for successful college work, and they are placed in a developmental class. Reading this course, most freshmen with weak backgrounds in writing think that English classes are boring, purposeless, or both. Frequently, this negative opinion is confirmed during the first few meetings of a class, and students participate with minimal enthusiasm and success. To avoid such rapid alienation, I suggest the use of a body of introductory material which may serve as the base for an involved and committed study of writing.

When teaching developmental English, I like to promote language awareness before I attempt to develop correctness. Although some of the ideas I bring to class are often reserved for graduate students in linguistics and English education, these ideas are essential as the basis for any discussion of communication. For example, my first class begins with my asking students to distinguish between content and context. Content, which is the idea, message, or meaning that a writer’s words express, does not elude most students, and I have a positive start. But context, the force that surrounds and shapes the meaning of words, is more difficult for students to explain. To illustrate, I suggest the withered porch of a decaying shack in the hills of Tennessee. Two men sit on rockers, their thumbs under the straps of their overalls, passing a jug back and forth. When one says to the other, "We sure is having fun," it is very unlikely that the other will think that something is wrong with his friend’s grammar. In that context, I argue, language has few rules of correctness.

To reveal a context where many rules of correctness apply, I suggest that a student has received an invitation to a Presidential ball. He dresses in his finest clothes, and the butler announces his name as he enters the ballroom. Stepping forward to meet the President, the student thinks carefully about what he says and tries not to say something inappropriate to the situation. In that context, all kinds of rules of correctness are in effect; furthermore, violations are noticeable and embarrassing.

Making my examples support a point, I remark that every context has its own rules of correctness. In a familiar context the rules are relaxed, whereas in a formal context the rules are observed. The point is that one must be able to shift the level of his writing and speech to meet the needs of a particular context.

The students accept this explanation and are ready to support it with examples of their own. Envisioning a variety of possible levels of usage, students can notice such things as regional accents. Others point out the existence of slang. Finally, others even confess that within their families two languages have merged, and the blend of tongues is sometimes understandable only to members of the family. Within each context, however, rules and conventions are observed.
With the problem of context in mind, the class can face the question, "What context prevails in college writing?" The answer will vary from teacher to teacher, depending upon the philosophy of the instructor, but a recognition of the meaning of context and a definition of the context for the student writer are prerequisites for any writing assignment.

For example, suppose that an instructor specifies that all papers will be written for a formal context. In such a context, the teacher insists that the formal rules of standard English prevail. These rules do not imply that there is anything incorrect or "wrong" about any other functional variety of English which exists on a continuum ranging from informal to formal; on the contrary, no language is incorrect unless it is used in an inappropriate context. The man on the porch in Tennessee would be a buffoon at the Presidential ball, and if the student in his tuxedo were to arrive at the porch, he would be sure to spur some drunken laughter.

The words rules, standard English, and functional variety have been added to the discussion of context and formality, and at this point it may be necessary to slow down for a clarification of terms. But when the students understand that the strictness of rules corresponds to the formality of the context, then they are entitled to know where the rules come from. After all, Moses did not descend from the mountain with the Harbrace College Handbooks, and if he did not, who invented the rules?

An effective answer lies in a brief discussion of history. During the eighteenth century, England was a nation of proven power and excellence; England regarded its language as a central part of its culture, and to protect the language, distinguished writers such as Dryden and Swift participated in an academy which attempted to fix the rules of usage. At that time, the rules of Latin were applied to English, and the prescribed grammar of English closely paralleled Latin's grammar in many ways. This system prevailed until the end of the nineteenth century, when descriptive linguistics proposed that language itself exists before any rules of language. Therefore, all attempts to define usage must be based upon extensive observation of many speakers and writers. The rules are only the results of the phenomenon of language. Finally, the most popular recent attempt to specify the rules of grammar is the work of the transformationists. In such a grammar, the rules define possible ways to compose an infinite variety of grammatical sentences (and only grammatical sentences), but the grammar is also that because it accounts for ambiguity and provides efficient explanations of complex verb constructions. Thus, the answer to the question about who makes the rules is that different rules come from different sources at different times.

Despite the progress in the field of grammatical theory, the students see that no grammar is a perfect explanation of language; consequently, the student must understand that his grammar text, even his teacher, cannot account for everything. Furthermore, the rules change as time passes, and as soon as a student knows that he has mastered the rules, he finds that he must learn the revisions. One only has to look at the spline of Harbrace to see the big number eight. Students are usually surprised to learn that editors of a grammar book have found it necessary to revise their explanations eight times.

The class now knows that context determines which rules are in effect and that systems of rules are imperfect and subject to change. The problem which faces the class is the learning of the skill to make language appropriate to its context. In college, where the context is often assumed to be formal, the mastery of standard English is a necessity. However, one

Continued on page 16
to be done outside of the junior high school day. During class hours, students read books by the various authors or worked on group projects.

Each student was required to research one author and to make an oral report to the class, complete with visuals of some kind. In addition, each student was to read at least three books from each of the two authors, and to make a chart comparing the two authors as to style, characters, background, plot, and other pertinent information. Finally, each student was to work on a group project of some kind to present to the class. This could be a map, a timeline, a chart, a mobile, a literary calendar, a crossword puzzle, or any other related project which the group might suggest. As the unit progressed, these colorful projects tended to decorate the room, whetting the curiosity of the other classes who were not working on the project.

Some of the boys and girls complained that the work load was too heavy, and in retrospect, I feel that perhaps I did require a good deal of them. However, they all came through and met the requirements—some better than others—despite the fact that a few of the students considered their class periods to be social hours and must, therefore, have had to really scramble after school hours in order to finish all their work.

From time to time I called the librarians at Stout to check on the conduct of my students, for they were warned that this project was an experiment and the use of the facilities in the future by junior high students would be determined by how well my class could handle the responsibility. The reports of the Stout staff were encouraging. They were impressed with both the diligence and resourcefulness of the students, and felt, at the conclusion, that the experiment had been a success.

The boys and girls had been instructed in how to take notes and how to compile an outline from their many sources. Using only this outline as a guide, each gave an oral report to the class and later wrote a summary of the author's life. These summaries, many accompanied by pictures of the authors, were typed and assembled into a booklet. At the conclusion of the unit, each student received a copy of the booklet as a souvenir of the class's industry.

From the booklet, I have gathered the following juxtapositions: "Carroll's [Ryrie Brink] grandfather, Dr. William G. Watkins, was a well-known physician in Moscow, Idaho. His death is still part of Moscow's history."

"Laura Ingalls Wilder moved with her family to Kansas. There she was afraid of Indians and afraid that Santa wouldn't come."

"Scott O'Dell was unofficially born in 1899 and officially born on May 23, 1903 in Los Angeles."

"Roy Chapman Andrews was born in Beloit, Wisconsin, January 26, 1884. He said it was 2:00 o'clock in the morning and was about 30 degrees below zero."

"Sterling North was born November 4, 1906, on the shores of Lake Koshkonong. Sterling was short with brown hair and brown eyes. He wore rimless glasses most of his life."

Of the twenty-three authors my class researched, (from over 200 listed in the booklet) five received Newbery Awards, four received Pulitzer Prizes, two received Boy's Club of America Awards, and two were Phi Beta Kappas. Many of the twenty-three authors wrote prolifically and received other less well-known awards. Truly, Wisconsin authors have had a decided impact on American literature.

It was my original intention that the Wisconsin Authors unit was to be the beginning of a series of yearly units until we had covered as many of the Wisconsin authors as we could unearth. Since the completion of the unit, however, I have chosen to take an early retirement, so this beginning project, for me, has turned into a fitting and happy conclusion to my teaching career.

The first two of the next series of articles, by Professors Joseph Schwartz and Todd Bender, are based on papers given at the NCTE Annual Convention, 1978. Following these are brief descriptions of comparable "beginning" literature courses at several other Wisconsin universities.

THE FIRST COURSE IN LITERATURE AT THE COLLEGE LEVEL

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For as long as anyone can remember Marquette University has had a two-semester Freshman English graduation requirement for all students, and a two-semester graduation requirement in literature for students in the College of Liberal Arts, the School of Education, the College of Journalism, and the College of Business Administration. Many students in the College of Nursing, in Medical Technology, and in Physical Therapy take such courses to fulfill their humanities requirement. We enroll few students from the College of Engineering in the literature courses. A student may fulfill the literature requirement by taking courses offered by the Department of English or by the Department of Classical and Modern Languages. Over 90% of the students take the courses offered by the Department of English. The enrollment in the sophomore English courses runs from about 1000 to 1500 students per semester. The courses offered in the current semester are Major American Writers (the most popular), Major British Writers (the least popular), Literature, Music and Art, and Modern Poetry. Until the early sixties we offered only one course—Survey of British Literature. In the sixties we offered a combined four-semester literature and composition course (replacing English 1 and 2 and the Introductory Literature course) in which the subject matter was divisional by semester, rather than distributed across the four semesters. In the early sixties and early seventies we offered a wide variety of different courses with catchy titles emphasizing a good deal of contemporary literature. We now offer a limited number of courses (four) to lessen the demands on the staff and to equalize somewhat what the content of the education being given to the students. We will move, I think (hope), to two courses—Major British Writers and Major American Writers—within the next few semesters. The moral of this tale is simple: never throw away your notes from Graduate School. The more things change, the more they remain the same.

In our system of curriculum review each department offering courses required for graduation must periodically justify such offerings to the College Curriculum Committee. In justifying our offerings we have relied heavily on the implications of Cardinal Newman's notion that of all disciplines literature is the least parochial—not the most important—but the least parochial, taking as its province the entire range of human activity: man in relationship to himself, to others, and to God. We have pointed to the history of formal education in the Western World which reveals that at every point in this history, language and literature were at the center of each educational endeavor. Why has literature in particular merited such universal favor?

First, the study of literature is the experience and the knowledge of those works which by common agreement make up the Great Tradition: the masterpieces which transcend their age and the minorpieces which bespeak their age. This is the indispensable starting point. If we forget that,
we are in trouble, for then we begin to teach students instead of teaching a subject matter to students—the heresy that stretches from William Lyon Phelps to Benjamin DeMott.

Second, these works are part of the Great Tradition precisely because they are literature and not because they are something else. They humanize the reader because they deal with all that is human (and they are didactic), but they are not political, ethical, philosophical, or religious tracts. To see them as such is a process of reduction to a common denominator—a heresy seen in such widely divergent schools as the Old American Humanist Movement (Irving Babbitt) to the contemporary International Marxist movement (Frederic Jameson or Lucien Goldman). When I say these works are literature, I mean that they are structured embodiments of the imagination in language, not a way of knowing as distinguished from the body of knowledge itself, although the two are intimately conjoined. Hence, the study of literature can be said to prevent us from being single-minded, but never militates against our sense of commitment. It reveals the penetrating and rich ambiguities of the human condition. It gives us the opportunity to explore the ongoing act of humanization by confronting us with the aesthetic object to energize our spiritual faculties. It is one way to wisdom (not the only way), since inevitably it points to the transcendent concerns of mankind.

In order to reach the vital goals for a liberal education implied in these claims, we in the Department of English must do two things: 1. We must teach literature and not something else.

As to the first point, at the present time, because of declining course enrollments, some teachers of literature are wondering if it is not a matter of survival to teach literature, since it is unentertaining, as if it were entertainment on the premise that something, no matter how bad, is better than nothing for the students. (Contrariwise, I believe that after the fifth grade, nothing is better than something.) If we give students what we think they want, and if what we think they want is trivial, superficial, jejune, and vapid, we cannot meet the goals implicit in the nature of our discipline. Bad writing confirms the parochial perspective of our students, narrows the range of their choices, denies them rich multiplicity of vision, and confirms a sloppy attitude toward language. What is to be quickened to life in the reader because of the experience of literature remains dead. Of all the humanists, we in literature seem most susceptible to consider "relevant" approaches. Is it because we have lost confidence in our discipline as an integral, coherent, and vital subject? If we teach what is less than literature to make our course offerings allegedly more attractive, we do a disservice to the student and to the discipline.

I am reminded in this connection of Evelyn Waugh's Scott-King returning to his school after a tour of post-war Europe. The headmaster, asks him to teach some fashionable courses, since the study of the classics is no longer considered "relevant."

"I'm a 'Greats' man myself," says the headmaster. "I deplore it as much as you do. But what can we do? Parents are not interested in producing the 'complete' man anymore. They want to qualify their boys for jobs in the modern world. You can hardly blame them can you?"

"Oh yes," Scott-King replies. "I can and do." For "it would be very wicked indeed to do anything to fit a boy for the modern world."

From a practical point of view, we are bound to guess wrong if we try to follow what is faddish and popular; we do not have the quick footwork needed to detect what is low or high on the student stock market until after the fact. And we over-estimate what we think the student demand for relevance or entertainment is at any particular point. It has been my experience that by and large students with the ability to master college work want. whether they know it or not (and many know it), substantial work, derived from the core of the discipline and at the very cutting edge of knowledge.

As to the second point, we must teach literature as well as we can. Serious self-examination on our part is needed. The range of choices we teach and the mode of our education as professors has made it seem more important to teach graduate and upper division courses to majors, causing neglect of the Introductory course in literature. Somehow we must encourage ourselves and the students and the profession to give to the introductory course the same kind of attention we regularly give to other courses. From a practical point of view, the introductory course (along with Freshman English) pays the bill for the rest of our work. From a theoretical point of view, we have a profound moral obligation to educate the citizenry of the commonweal who secure a college education in those values which our discipline offers. This task is as important as any other task we undertake. All tenured staff should teach the introductory course regularly. In an university if it is possible (and it is) for an excellent teacher without research potential to be terminated, it should be possible (as it is not) to terminate the excellent researcher who teaches poorly. (The point is deliberately overstated.) This means that we must take responsibility for monitoring our own teaching by the use of peer review groups, by the use of outside visitors, by surveys of student opinion, and by the use of televised tape performances for self-analysis. I stress that WE must do this; it should not be left to others. We must in this process be truly critical; we must talk about our teaching in the same way we discuss our research with our colleagues. I was always impressed, for instance, with the fact (Robert Frost pointed to it) that when the students' reaction to the whole freshman course at the University of Chicago. We have a great deal to share with each other, and I am puzzled as to why a tradition of silence about what we do in the classroom ever grew up. Few subjects have more potential for excellence in the classroom than literature. It contains what educated men and women have always taken seriously, know that no one can make any subject interesting to everyone, but attention to pedagogy can only help us. We have to work to make literature dull. Yet quite often we do make it dull; and when students tell us they do not like literature, often they are telling us that they do not like what we do with it.

I am fully aware of the fact that the cultural climate is against us. I think it important to remember that we are in an ambience of a culture which is in every way hostile to what literature has to offer: clarity, precision, beauty and force in the use of language, and values both natural and transcendent. Whereas the principal forces of our cultural climate work to blunt our sensitivity and to corrupt our values, I agree with T. S. Eliot's view that this is a dark age, and that we must wait with patience for it to run its course. I do not underestimate this discouraging fact. Yet, finally, it is a given and must be faced. It does not provide us with an excuse for not trying to make our subject as interesting to students as it is inherently. I recommend the attitude of T. S. Eliot: "There is another purpose, quite another purpose, behind the Crash Up. 'The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the
ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise. For every reason to despair, there is an equally compelling reason to persist. In the humanistic sense, we are not likely to prevail, but we can always endure.

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE COURSE UW-MADISON

TODD K. BENDER

Most students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have an undergraduate requirement of six credit hours of literature. Most of these students satisfy the requirement by taking in successive semesters of the freshman year our English 207 and 208, Introduction to Modern Literature and Modern Literature. These courses enroll between three and four thousand students per semester and are by far the largest courses offered by the English department. They are frequently the only literature courses taken by undergraduates in their college years. Although these courses are the core of the 'productivity' of the English department, the structure and format of them evolved in response to teaching assistants' contract negotiations, budgetary concerns, scheduling and classroom guidelines, in such a way that educational policy sometimes had to take a back seat to more pressing demands. Nevertheless, they are highly successful in the formal, written student evaluations and a source of pride for the teachers involved.

The courses are taught by teams of one professor and several teaching assistants who handle approximately 250 students in large lecture groups. All 250 students meet for two hours of lecture each week and then divide into groups of 19 students for a laboratory or discussion meeting for the third hour, usually conducted by teaching assistants. Each team of teachers devises its own reading list, assignments, and lectures so that the dozen or so separate courses are often quite dissimilar. The teaching assistant contract dictates the amount of written work to be graded for each student, usually two five-page papers plus a six-week and a final examination.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

English 207-208 is designed to teach students to read, discuss, and write about British and American literature, to help them develop critical discernment, and to suggest to them the values and pleasures that good literature offers. A central emphasis of the course is on enabling students to read literature in a way that is personally meaningful to them. Students should be given an understanding of what literature is and what formal elements comprise a work of art. Therefore, our basic task is to assure that the students will learn some of the kinds of questions asked about literary works and how to go about finding productive answers.

The focus of the course will be on specific literary texts within a coherent framework selected by the instructor; this permits the introduction of historical, social, or biographical information which will help to illuminate the texts and to avoid duplication of material. Texts in English 207 normally should be selected from eighteenth-century British and American literature. Texts in 208 normally should be selected from the nineteenth-century British and American literature. This does not imply that the courses should necessarily be structured as surveys of eighteenth and nineteenth-century literature; instructors in either course may wish to include some literature from other periods for comparative or other purposes. A variety of course structures may be appropriate, such as: generic, major figures, major works, thematic, and historical. It should be emphasized that the primary objective of English 207-208 is to derive basic methods of close reading and writing about literature; texts selected for discussion should be conducive to this end. Our goal should be that every student, by the end of the course, is able to read a variety of kinds of literary texts with enjoyment and understanding.

Our experience suggests that although students in any section will likely range from those who are well trained in close reading to those who are either unfamiliar with the technique or unaware of a need to develop it, the majority will not be proficient at close reading; nor will they possess an adequate command of the vocabulary necessary for discussing literature. Although instructors may wish to include generic, thematic, historical, biographical, and sociological concerns, the method of close reading should be given priority at this level. A handbook offering definitions and examples of literary terms and an index to guide reading would be useful to the student interested in this area. In addition to the readings and assignments in the course text, students should be made aware of the ways in which a metaphor, image, tone, characterization, plot, setting, sound devices, rhythm, theme, etc. in a story, should be able to understand the relationship between form and content in the texts.

The best way to see what my team does in English 208 is to look at the textbook we have developed for the course: Modernism in Literature by Bender, Armstrong, Brigham, and Knoblock (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1977). In addition to a generous selection of readings in modern literature, this textbook provides samples of student essays actually written in our course, as well as the written form of the assignments we set. It also includes introductions sketching our lecture material, a critical guide to close reading and essay writing and an index to useful literary terms.

The syllabus asserts that the objectives of the course are to formulate a definition of modern literature and to learn the process by which formal definitions of complex data can be made. The ability to define something is what entitles us to say what things that is, the first extended attempt at formal definition of literature was the Poetics of Aristotle (384-322 BC). Aristotle confronted a set of highly complicated Greek plays and asked: What are these things we call tragedies? This question is that question by apprehending the texts with a series of questions which demand different kinds of definitions. Examples of Aristotle's modes of definition:

1. Where does it come from? (etymological definition)
2. What is it? (effective definition)
3. What set of things does it belong to and how does it differ from other members of that set? (definition by class and specific difference)
4. What are its parts and how is it put together? (analytic definition)

In Modernism in Literature (pp. 745-60), we have tried to state clearly the features of literary language which we hope our students will be able to understand. The course is not only about a deeper understanding of the language, but equally important, with a better knowledge of the process by which formal definitions can be made. The course will stress basic skills of writing and reading complex texts.

If we ask of modern literature, "What does it do," there are three main replies: (1) Art mirrors nature, (2) Art expresses a state of mind, (3) Art renders impressions. It is a model for the activity of mind encountering reality (see Modernism in Literature, p. 11). This course is divided into three segments corresponding to these three differing aims. For the first six weeks we will focus on art which is mimetic, aiming to mirror an external reality. The second five weeks will concern expressive art, which expresses a state of mind or a mental reality. The final five weeks will examine impressionist art, which tries to capture the act of perception in an artistic model.

There follows a weekly list of works to be read: Udipe, Sillitoe, Frost, D.H. Lawrence, Hardy, Roethke, T.S. Elliot, Yeats, and so on. There is also a weekly list of lecture topics which are usually analytic tools necessary for accurate reading: dramatic situation, persona, limited narration, meter and poetic form, metaphor, and so on. Typically the lecture will demonstrate an analytic definition of the use of metaphor in a work and then the students will practice in a laboratory session the same sort of operation by reading a different text.

In Modernism in Literature (pp. 745-60), we have tried to state clearly the features of literary language which we hope our students will be able to understand...
to define: dramatic situation, figurative language, connotation and denotation, semantic categories, value markings, ambiguity, plot, character, and narration. If teachers want to prepare students in high school for advanced work in English at the University of Wisconsin, they would do well to examine the processes and concepts there stated and to try to incorporate them in whatever subjects they currently teach. Most of the students in our 207/208 curriculum have a decent understanding of practical English (those who rank below a certain mark in their incoming tests are required to take an additional, more elementary course in reading and writing before enrolling in 207). But many of our students have never practiced explication and are quite baffled by elementary notions of dramatic situation, metaphor, or dramatic form. Once they have been exposed to these ideas, they pick them up quickly. A glance at the sample student essays in Modernism in Literature will show how well they are able to use such techniques after a few weeks' work.

Although English 207/208 is described as a historical course, dealing with the 19th and the 20th century, the aim of the courses is to encourage close reading. We avoid the error that close reading is unhistorical, however. "Close" reading is a metaphor. Close reading? Far from being. The tenor of the metaphor seems to be accurate, careful, constructive reading. It is a self-evident absurdity that careful or accurate reading can be done without historical context. For that reason we welcome the historical coherence that these courses provide so that each new text illuminates the others. When we read Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et decorum est . . . ," which describes the ghastly death by poison gas of a soldier at the front in World War I and ends ironically with the lines from Horace's poem that it is sweet and proper to die for the fatherland, our students need to be reminded that poison gas and trench warfare were used in World War I. They need to know what Horace's Latin words mean. But most of all they need to know that jingoistic attitudes about dying for the fatherland are being undercut in the critical realism of Owen's work. There is very little value to the poem unless it is read in the context of its criticism of previously held attitudes. Because of the historical coherence of our reading material, by the end of a semester, students are beginning to see Sexton in the light of D.H. Lawrence, Owen in the light of Rilke. Such comparisons within a historical context are not a distraction from close reading, but essential to accurate reading.

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE – UW-EAU CLAIRE

DOUG PEARSON

The Introduction to Literature course at Eau Claire has three major objectives: to provide first-year university students with a basic reading experience involving literature in the three principal genres: fiction (short story and novel), poetry, and drama; to instill appreciation for the literary heritage; and to develop an ability to read with critical understanding.

The general outline of the course is organized by type but it is also possible to have an organization by theme. After a general introduction to the concept of literary types, the fiction unit is initiated with the short story. Discussion of such concepts as fable and tale, point of view, character, theme and symbol is accomplished through such works as Chekhov's "In Exile," Joyce's "Clay," Brantigan's "The Kool-Aid Minor" and Porter's "Flowering Judas." The second segment of the fiction unit introduces the novel, discussing such representative novels as Conrad's "Heart of Darkness," Donleavy's "The Ginger Man," Eliot's "The Invisible Man," Woolf's "A Room of One's Own," and the poetry unit focuses on such concepts as the person in the poem, words and their order, imagery, song and sound using a wide selection of poets. The final drama unit is divided among tragedy, comedy, and theater in the 20th century; the dramatists range from Shakespeare to Shaw to Albee.

A paper is assigned in conjunction with the study of the three major units and the novel. Such assignments are prepared in accordance with guidelines offered in Roberts' Writing Themes About Literature, 4th ed.

Students are graded on the four out-of-class essay assignments, a midterm examination, and a final examination. Discussion grades and short quizzes may also be given at the choice of the instructor.

INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE – UW-PLATTEVILLE

GEORGE R. MAHONEY

In the late '60s the UW-Platteville English department Curriculum Committee decided to try something "innovative" (as hundreds of other colleges and universities were doing) and offer courses in thematic studies, which dealt largely with contemporary concerns of undergraduates—war, love, crime, drugs, etc. We attempted and still are attempting to introduce "good" literature to students by demonstrating its relevance to everyday problems.

Since literature is one of the options in our humanities component, under the general requirements, many students elect to take at least one English course beyond Freshman Composition. Thematic studies proved to be very popular. Unfortunately, the popularity of thematic studies resulted in the demise of our Masterpieces courses and a marked drop in enrollment in American and English literature courses.

But "times they are a-changing." Or, to be more accurate, "the pendulum has swung back" or "we have come full circle." Whatever the cliche, it seems that as students are finding beer drinking more rewarding than drugs (which was true in my day) they are also showing an interest in literary genre that is not necessarily of the moment.

Sensing this change, the Curriculum Committee decided to try an Introduction to Literature course. We even felt safe enough to call it that. The textbooks for the course include An Approach to Literature by Brooks, Purser and Warren and Native Son by Richard Wright.

An Approach to Literature has an excellent introduction, particularly for the neophyte, which attempts to answer the questions: What is literature? What is fiction? Once a common vocabulary (plot, character, setting, theme, point of view, etc.) is established the editors provide a judicious selection of short stories, poetry and drama for discussion. At the end of each story, poem and play there are discussion questions and explanations of the use of certain styles or techniques. For example, two poems, Thomas Hardy's "On an Invitation to the United States" and Robert Southey's "His Books," are compared and contrasted in terms of "situation," "attitude," "imagery," "diction" and "rhythm and meter." The same sort of thing is done with the short story and the drama. Different stories and dramas are used to emphasize different literary techniques, styles and objectives. An Approach to Literature does not contain a novel so I, arbitrarily, chose
INTRODUCTION TO LITERATURE – UW-STEVEN'S POINT

HAZEL M. KOSKENLINNA

The catalog describes this course as a study of literature, emphasizing the development of the student's critical vocabulary, recognition of the various forms of literature, and rudimentary analysis of selected works. It requires sophomore standing as a prerequisite, except that it is open to English majors in the second semester of their freshman year.

English 200 was designed specifically for, and is required of, English majors and minors. Other students are not excluded from it, but are informed of its purpose and of other courses which would probably meet their needs better. English majors and minors are urged to take English 200 early in their sequence of English courses, since the course introduces them to literary terms, critical methods, and to the various literary genres. Perrine's Structure, Sound and Sense is currently used as the basic text for the course, supplemented by other texts as the instructors of the several sections desire.

Non-Major Literature
Continued from page 28

The battle we must fight has only begun and it will be a long one, but I, for one, am not so pessimistic as I was a few months ago. I think we can convince students and the non-academic world of the value of literary study if we reaffirm our commitment to service (or in many cases, develop that commitment) in literature as well as in writing, if we face the necessity to be more political, if we realize that we owe the non-majors the benefit of our best teachers, and if we continually re-evaluate and adjust the present curriculum as well as experiment in new directions.

Notes


2 I did not seek information concerning literature requirements for non-majors because I wished to find out how we might attract voluntary students or how we might encourage them to select literature to fulfill 'distribution' requirements to take a certain number of courses from the humanities. I did learn that most universities still have those distribution requirements, probably being strengthened by Harvard's core curriculum; many still require a sophomore literature sequence.

Editor's Note: Following our recent practice, the following foci are announced for the future issues of the Wisconsin English Journal: Censorship; Language Learning; Women's Image in Literature

Submission of articles is welcomed, indeed, urged. Please send them to: Dr. N.J. Karolides, Editor, Wisconsin English Journal, University of Wisconsin-River Falls, River Falls, WI 54022.
NON-MAJOR LITERATURE: COMBATING THE DECLINE

SUE B. BECKHAM
University of Wisconsin — Stout, Menomonie

Most of us who teach English in college are increasingly concerned over declining enrollments of non-English majors in literature courses. We feel this concern for several reasons: 1) Most of us entered the field prepared to teach more and more literature courses, preferably in one field of speciality, as we advance professionally; 2) the demand for more non-major students in literature courses is more prevalent; 3) we find declining interest in literature and increased demand for writing instruction; thus, we teach more and more composition; 2) The employment situation has resulted in our feeling insecure as fewer students elect courses in any area taught by English departments; 3) The same job situation has resulted in fewer English majors and, therefore, a pragmatic need for more non-major students; 4) We know, though few say it statistically, that good reading results in better writing; 5) Perhaps most important, we genuinely feel that the study of literature can enrich our students' lives and that if we expose ourselves willingly to literature, they would find literary study a lifelong source of enrichment. At the moment, we seem to be winning the composition battle; that is, the non-academic world has become aware that decent writing ability is necessary for success in most fields, and business and professional people are turning to English Departments as the source of that good writing. But, at the same time, respect for literature as a necessary study is eroding everywhere—even within our own ranks.

Confronted by this decline of respect for the study of literature, even scorned by some departments, the University of Wisconsin-Stout English Department started looking for ways to make our literature offerings more attractive to non-major students. Thus, early in 1977, I received from the West Central Wisconsin Consortium, a funder of projects to improve undergraduate teaching, a grant for conducting a study of Mid-West English Departments in nearly open admissions state supported universities to determine which were attracting willing students to literature courses. The study was nonstatistical since surveys showing the decline of enrollments in literature are easily found in the journals. I was determined not to compile a list of specific new courses devised by single charismatic individuals—articles on "How to Sell an English Teacher" also abound in the journals. I do, however, intend in this paper to report on several specific courses, devised by groups and offered in multiple sections.

Of the sixty departments I originally contacted, about ten failed to respond; some other responses were, however, less than helpful. For instance, I attached to my original letter a questionnaire asking for specific information about enrollments, requirements, etc. A few overworked chairs merely skimmed my letter, filled out the questionnaire and returned it, confident that they had done what they could to aid my study. A small but significant number of these responses arrived with no indication of their origin. Another group responded only with requests for helpful information since their literature programs are in trouble. One apparently discouraged soul merely returned my questionnaire blank and my letter in a return mail envelope with "The state of the profession is depressing" scrawled in the margin. Over half, however, reported valiant, often successful efforts to interest non-major students in literature.

In reporting on these efforts, I will divide the findings as follows: 1) a discussion of general practices which seem necessary for success in drawing willing students to non-major literature programs, 2) the assumption behind the two disparate approaches of offering literature to the non-major: the traditional and the non-traditional, 3) some specific non-traditional success stories.

Before I proceed to the first of the general practices that seem requisite for success with non-major literature, I should emphasize that the feelings of most of our correspondents were expressed by George Gleason of Southeastern University who said, "I have tried many approaches and I have not found one which has worked." But do I. The problem is complex and any hope requires a complex combination of new attitudes, approaches, and attributes. Some departments have already begun to perceive themselves and their mission quite differently from the way English Departments used to.

Most departments whose literature enrollments have not declined, and some in which it has grown, report that they have restructured the whole departmental philosophy to one of service. Now, those who are successful reflect a willing acceptance of their department's function as their most important function. Several chairs of formerly large major and graduate departments express the belief that their most important mission now is to serve the students, the university, the community—and they do so with a hope for the future rather than a regretful look at the past. They point out the necessity to view the literature students not as majors and not to select the majors in the classes for special attention. Dr. James Quivey of Eastern Illinois State University states it thus:

The Department gets virtually all students for two university requirement courses, Composition and Types of Literature. We try not to alienate students in these two courses: we take into account the fact that we are talking to freshmen, not majors; we spend more time on the human values and think less on hard skills; we avoid talking out "those who are going to be majors" and talking about the vast range of skills needed by people who are going to study literature; and we try to teach as many people to write reasonably well as we can—people who know that their lack of writing proficiency will doom them in a literature course...And articulation with high schools makes a difference. Students who elect literature courses in college uniformly have had good English experiences in high school. Currently an excellent teacher in a nearby high school—one that sends many students to us—has been teaching sixty seniors in a single seminar in satire. If two or three years from now we offer a topics course in satire, we very likely will draw several of those students.

The subject of articulation with local high schools brings me to a most pressing need for articulation with the university outside of the English Departments. Dr. Thomas A. Van of the University of Louisville calls this second major necessity, if we are to fill lower division literature courses, "The Politics of Advisement." Many of the more successful literature departments practice these politics, but only Dr. Van is so honest in giving a name to what he does. He states that the importance of making advisors all over campus aware of what we in English have to offer, and he advocates cultivating friendships with those alien in industrial tech—calling them for lunch, attending their curriculum committee meetings, even bargaining with them for the use of their facilities if necessary—anything to assure that students graduate from college with some literature experience. He concludes in the 'politics of advisement' believe our subject matter to be so important for the students that no avenue for convincing the rest of the campus of that value should be neglected.
Dr. Van, who has committed himself and his department to combating declining interest in literature, joins many other successful chairs in staffing the sophomore level general education courses with the very finest teachers. Alas, all too often for my sense of well being, such staffing is described as "our best young teachers," or enthusiastic young staff or "dedicated young specialists." Now, I refuse to equate good teaching with youth, to assume that the older we get, the less effective we must become. But I think the implications of this emphasis on the young are clear: we must watch to see that we don't allow our methods and content and enthusiasm to grow old along with our bodies.

In an address at a recent Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English convention published elsewhere in this issue, Dr. Joseph Schwartz of Marquette University stressed the importance of the best teaching at the introductory levels.

Thus, the three general policies which may promote success with non-major lit courses, amount to an almost complete reversal of the old practice of rewarding excellence with upper division or graduate courses, of assuming that general education is slave labor, and of smiling upon ever more narrow specialization.

It may come as a surprise to many, but several of the most successful literature programs have insisted on offering their non-majors only the traditional survey and genre courses—not stubbornly, but because through thoughtful analysis of the situation they have come to the conclusion that students can both be served through the traditional approach. In some cases, departments have discarded their so-called innovative courses because students chose the traditional courses and spurned the chic new ones.

These institutions, and apparently the students therein, believe that with a strong traditional background, students have the equipment to investigate on their own their thematic interests, but with a course on "Madness in Literature," they are only equipped to investigate madness. There seem to be no unifying characteristics to help determine which universities will be so fortunate, but the traditional should be tried if the department is genuinely convinced that traditional content best serves the student, especially if the culture approaches have failed. Support of the traditional approach is expressed eloquently in the following paragraph from a letter from Robert L. Kindrick of Central Missouri State University:

I am not certain that our program has much to offer by way of innovation, unless traditional attitudes and offerings may now be considered innovative. As you will see, for the most part we have maintained course structures which have been a part of humanities programs. In other words, I do not view the factors within our department that account for our ability to maintain enrollments. I would particularly emphasize two. The first is that we have remained committed to the notion that general studies are service courses. This does not mean that standards are to be lowered or that our teachers are to be "personality" who try to amuse more than teach, but it does mean that all of our staff (everyone in the department teaches these courses) is asked to think in terms of the general student. In that manner, I feel that many of the courses can be approached in a fashion somewhat different from that we use with majors. I feel that one of the major problems in general studies offerings during the last few years has been the assumption that those courses could be used for curriculum experimentation and that the needs of the students were not our concern. I too might enjoy teaching yet another course in Arthurian romance, Beowulf, or science fiction, but experiments in courses such as those should probably be reserved for our majors, not foisted upon general studies students who need and expect other things. The second factor so relates to staff attitudes. Within the framework of our courses, staff members have made an effort to make the courses as attractive as possible, both by improving their own control of the material and by inviting others to team teach or provide guest lectures. We take our general studies courses quite seriously. We have had our hard times (during 1968-70 when enrollments declined), but staff commitment has helped reassure our students that the courses are intended to be as valuable for them as we can make them.

Other departments, I'm afraid, offer only traditional courses for different reasons—they haven't bothered to take their students' interests and needs into consideration or to attempt to adjust with the times. They have majors allowing their old sophomore literature courses to lie moribund where they were twenty years ago. Needless to say, these departments aren't attracting many willing non-majors to their literature classes.

Perhaps these departments would do well to join the many who are succeeding with non-traditional courses and approaches. Before I turn to more specific suggestions which may help our floundering or foundering programs, let me point out one promising highway to success which has almost inevitably slipped through my original purview of investigating innovative use of equipment and special materials. What I have to report is that, with a few exceptions, experiments with more use of equipment and aids, advertising courses as "multi-media," etc. have produced disappointing results. For instance, at Northern Illinois University, the department designed an especially attractive course using such devices as films and records, labeled it "multi-media," staffed it with a very popular teacher, scheduled it at a very popular hour—and the course was "outdrawn" by a standard sophomore lit course taught by a less popular teacher at the same time. Students, unsophisticated though they seem, cannot be hoodwinked by new wrappings for old packages. This is not to say that films, video tapes, etc. cannot be valuable teaching aids—many individuals have found them invaluable—but they apparently aren't going to sell a course.

One notable exception is the course in film: "Interpreting Film" or "Literature Into Film" and so forth. These seem to go, perhaps because teaching the film itself as opposed to using film as a supplement is a fairly new approach.

Many departments, as we all know, have succeeded with their courses: "The Anti-Hero in Literature," "The War Between the Sexes," "Identity Crisis in Literature," and so on. The trouble with these courses is that the popular themes vary so frequently that curriculum committees are run ragged keeping up with course changes. A few years ago a department couldn't offer enough sections of "War in Literature"; now such a course will draw very few. One solution to that problem is the "umbrella" course title such as "220: Thematic Studies." Thus a course whose time has passed can be dropped from the curriculum, and a new one featuring current student interests can be written into the schedule without curriculum committee hassles.

One Wisconsin University surveys freshmen to see what special literature courses they might take the next year. Their most recent survey shows "Detective Fiction," "Science Fiction," "Sexuality and Marriage" and "Madness in Literature" as sure fillers; therefore, they have recruited from their present faculty those willing to work up such courses. Content flexibility, then, seems to be one key to success with the pop culture and thematic approaches.

Approaches to the pop culture and thematic methods of organizing literature courses fall into two general classifications: The first insists that the student read a substantial body of literature and discuss it on a level requiring thoughtful analysis. These courses, although organized around
popular topics, stress the importance of including recognized literary works and demanding that the students be challenged by them. The second method, which one chairman calls the "music appreciation" approach, presents superficial reading material which students cannot fail to understand or use in more sophisticated readings, asking only that students learn what a teacher can give them in a point by point lecture. We all know that most actual courses include elements of both approaches.

One subject area which can be approached using either of these methods, but which is invariably popular wherever it is taught is the Bible. Every department I've contacted which has offered "The Bible as Literature" has had great success with it, and I've investigated enough of these courses to know that, for the most part, history and literature of literature and not discourse in Christianity. Another area that is almost invariable successfully is folklore and myth, especially those courses in which the student may have a direct local or ethnic interest. For example, at Morehead State University in Kentucky, the course in Appalachian folklore always fills and often requires additional sections.

One more reason that Appalachian Folklore does so well is that it is scheduled at a time when adult part-time students can take it. Many departments have extended their service function to potential one-course students in the community. They have observed that, as people mature, they become more aware of the need for enrichment in their lives. These departments are directing courses at adults, who like our students, savor literature as a waste of time. While they were in college--or never had the opportunity to attend college when they were younger, and who wish now for a broader general knowledge. Thus these departments are offering courses aimed particularly at the adult who wants to take one course at a time, who may or may not be working toward a degree. Some, such as the University of Akron, offer classes designed for the community in the evening. For example, one of their staff members teaches the Jewish Novel at night at the Jewish Community Center.

Another successful departure from the assumption that all students are full-time undergraduates who take courses in three hour blocks is to offer one and two hour "mini-courses" which often begin in mid-semester--they drive the registrar crazy. One university which consistently fills these courses offers a variety of bizarre but presumably literature related titles: "Tops, Protons, etc; Archeoastronomy," and "Manhattan Project."

Less bizarre but equally unorthodox are two specific but very carefully planned courses which have been enormously successful in their departments. Once again, I turn to Dr. Van at the University of Louisville. His brainstorm this time is what he calls "The Chairman's Course" which he plans to offer once each year with different coordinators and different content. Last year the course, entitled "Nature: Half Created/Half Perceived," was offered in conjunction with a contemporary literature conference of the same name. The class met a noon; enrolled students, as well as anybody in the department who cared to attend one or more of the sessions, were invited to bring sack lunches. Dr. Van coordinates the course this year, but the plan is drawn by various department members who volunteered to teach their own nature related literary interests for one to three sections. Individuals who teach segments of the course are entirely responsible for the content and methods used in those segments; thus some use films, tapes and so forth; others use lectures or discussions. The course is academically demanding--that is, enrolled students are required to write papers, prepare assignments and take exams. Next year the course will be coordinated by some doctoral level graduate students who, when I interviewed Dr. Van, were keeping their plans top secret from him. Students, I am told, are very eager to enroll in next year's Chairman's Course.

At Western Michigan University, the faculty has given up on the idea of teaching the Great Books to undergraduates and instead offers a multiple section course entitled "Good Books" which filled twenty-two sections with a total of 742 students in 1977. The course has done so well that the department has responded to popular demand by developing "Good Books II" or "Son of Good Books," a sequel at a higher class level and within more challenging materials for those who want to do it all again.

The course draws its reading material from literature in the broadest sense: imaginative, biographical and autobiographical, history and even social documents with literary merit. The literature of the course is treated in a variety of ways: as fantasy and adventure; as imaginative response to fundamental human experience; as social criticism and analysis; as revelation of character and psychology; as vicarious experience of unfamiliar customs and cultures; but not primarily works of Literature with a capital L to be studied systematically only by the trained literary critic. Of course, students are asked to pay attention to such literary concerns as the artistic use of language, relevance of detail and imagery and significance of recurrent images.

Often within a section of "Good Books," a group of works will be related thematically, and throughout the sections, liberal use of such devices as films and guest speakers is made. For instance, one class combined out-of-class reading of A Farewell to Ama with in-class analysis of The Front as revelations of the historic and philosophical impact of World War I. Another class read Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe's Things Fall Apart, viewed film documentaries of Nigerian life and customs, and heard a Nigerian graduate student speak on his perceptions of Nigeria today.

Students are also required to keep journals, write papers and take exams. Shirley Scott, who teaches at least one section of the course every semester, says she has successfully taught Faulkner, Hardy, Austin, Tolstoy, Solzhenitsyn, and Achebe, but she emphasizes "that I must work hard to provide background, reading helps, study guides, and if I do so we [she and the students] make it."

I should mention that a course here at Stout entitled Best Sellers which includes a little of everything from Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe to Jaws and The Greening of America is exceptionally popular. However, the evidence on this course is not conclusive since so far it has only been taught by the instructor who designed it, and its popularity could easily carry over to the professor as to the content.

One final possibility for persuading students that the study of literature is both relevant and interesting arises from cooperation between the English Department and other departments. For instance, the South Dakota State University offers a little of everything with the Speech Department on a project whereby the theater will produce some of the same plays that the sophomores read in their introductory literature courses. And at Ferris State College in Big Rapids, Michigan, several faculty members are involved in an NIH funded interdisciplinary program in which the studies of psychology, ethics, sociology, and history and literature are combined with composition for a total of six hours credit in each of three quarters. The coordinators of the program, Thomas Kakoni, John Scally, and Jack Foggerty have told me they're willing to respond to written inquiries. They have had their difficulties, but they and the students are enthusiastic, and they are optimistic that they can gradually perfect the course.

Continued on page 29
a continual celebration
of my grandparents

there are days in apple summer
when the spoons and knives on the window sill
strangely still
all that is immediate
when the green trailing vines
on the old stone farmhouse walls
aren't objects in themselves
when the petunias and the elms
sting the nerves that remember my grandma
in whose large white arms
the brutality of life became a small gentle child
need only to be held
and loved

this day
is one of skin-scraped bleeding hands
bruised forearms
fingernails blackened by stones that now
are chimney

and my need to understand the trees that grow in my
dead grandparents' yard
is a need that grows faster than the
lives they watched grow to watch the children
who grew to watch the trees
that from my grandparents' life grew to grow again
is the only tangible certainty
of the pines and the popple

my life is now that of redleafed maple summer
of an oak in the wind before autumn
of waiting for last year's flowers to bloom again
and because it must be so
my tall bent grandfather
still stands in the pasture beyond the barbed-wire fence
and at his feet
time is loose in the grass

Mark Bruner
Poet In The Schools
Editor, Jump River Review, Wausau

Renewal}
The gray-black of the white
Starling,
a mute intensity
of torrent-waters
gashes of blue
foam-flecked
racing: A meandering course
Unleased by grey-soaked skies
or sunburst streaked,
Finding fulfillment in
A reincarnation of earth
And in death.

Dorothy M. Jordak
Samuel Morse Jr. High School
Milwaukee

BOOKS

FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS


While we have much to learn about children's reading preferences, we have all heard that children like humorous stories with action-filled plots. Chameleon Was A Spy and The Twenty Elephant Restaurant should be popular with primary-aged children, for each combines both of these features.

Chameleon is hired as a spy by the Pleasant Pickle Company. Because he is so skilled at changing his color to match his surroundings, he seems well suited to retrieve a pickle recipe, stolen by a rival company. Chameleon steals the recipe but he is discovered; he escapes capture but he is accidentally bottled in a pickle jar; he fears he will sit on a store shelf for months but his jar is quickly purchased; he is labeled as a pickle contaminant but his true identity is quickly discovered; his employers fear he has bungled the job but he proves himself to be a hero. Each of these problems is quickly yet logically introduced and each resolution is speedy and credible--there is no time for readers' interest to lag.

The humor is slapstick. Chameleon takes a couple of pratfalls (one into a pickle jar); the human characters react with melodramatic actions, the villains resort to ludicrous name calling. The cartoon style illustrations are bland and their placement on the page creates a cluttered effect. But the storyline should be sufficient to keep primary-age children interested.

The Twenty Elephant Restaurant is a zany story. It opens normally enough with an old man and woman complaining about their wobbly table. The woman urges her husband to build a new table and from that point on the story snowballs. After finding a strong tabletop tree, the old man builds a table, strong enough, he says, to hold an elephant. However, he has wood left over. One thing leads to another and he builds seventeen more tables so that he and his wife can open a restaurant. He also advertises for agile elephants who are willing both to dance upon and wait tables. The restaurant is opened and it is a great success, but the story isn't over. After a while, the tables begin to wobble and the man, his wife, and their entourage of elephants must move on in search of 'unwobbly' land.

The conversations between the husband and wife tie the unpredictable and ridiculous events together. The conversations also provide much of the humor, for Hoban has endowed his characters with a talent for understatement.

The illustrations alternate between watercolor and pen and ink. They add a comic touch to the book--the elephants look lumpy rather than agile, and McCully provides them with a variety of funny facial expressions. But a number of sharp-eyed children will find one discrepancy between the text and illustrations. The text states that the elephants ride in a truck, but the two page illustration which follows shows a procession of marching elephants.

Perhaps these two books provide us with a good example of why it is difficult if not impossible to categorize books by distinctions other than genre. Both books can be described as humorous and action-filled, but for very different reasons. Fortunately, primary age children will be untroubled by such distinctions. They will probably just enjoy each story.

Linda Western
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Marcia Brown. Listen To A Shape; Touch Will Tell; Walk With Your Eyes. New York: Franklin Watts, c1979


The number of children's books illustrated with photographs seems to have been increasing in recent years. Although many have been good books, others have suffered from muddy photography or reproduction, from displeasing placement of the photographs, and especially from texts which are weak because of slighthness, contrivance, or inappropriateness for photographic illustration. New books which illustrate the high
quality which can be found are the three by Marcia Brown and the one by the Cavagnaros. Illustrator and author Marcia Brown has turned to illustrating with photographs in the three new books, Touch Will Fall, Walk With Your Eyes, and Listen To A Shape. Listening is one of the things in the quality of all things and in the attention to the sensory detail which relates text and photograph. In this book Brown shows common shapes such as circles and triangles, asks questions to ponder such as the shape of the rain or the wind, and how different objects can have similar shapes and how imagination can suggest something new in a shape such as a tree root that looks like an elephant's foot. The title of the book suggests the message is to take the information, create a feeling, and provide a basis for imagination. There is humor in the photograph of a giraffe's tooth and in others; there is beauty in the text and in the photographs. Overall, these three books are some of the most artistically and conceptually solid this reviewer has seen in a long time.

The Pumpkin People is a simple story, but joyous in the exploration of the plant world, seasons, and the continuity of life. A family plants pumpkins and squash and then celebrates the harvest with friends by carving faces on the pumpkins and squash, lighting all of them, setting some out on small boats and arranging others in a group to be admired. The family then watches the pumpkin and squash faces wither and age until October rolls around and growth begins anew. The autumn photo shows the rough and lonely life of 'The Lone Dog' by Irene McLeod is suggested in a photograph of a dog circled in a field. The story is told with a dog's footprints in the sand and a dog on a leash. The dog's perspective captures the tone of the poem and serve as an added metaphor for its central thought—a very pleasing combination.

Poems have included which are philosophical, from "Markings" by Dag Hammarskjold, introspective "Changes" by Charlotte Zolotow, and descriptive, "The Troll" by Jack Prelutsky, Middle grade children are likely to respond more positively to the descriptive poems. The complete collection will appeal to high school students and adults as well. Teachers will find the book is excellent for building positive poetry experiences with their students.


Newest on the publishing scene is the innovative "Choose Your Own Adventure" series published by Bantam on July 1st and sure to become an instant favorite with young readers, particularly those who need a bit of novelty for entertainment.

The first three titles in the series—the Cave of Time (P. Packard), Journey Under the Sea (R. A. Montgomery), and By Balloon to the Sahara (D. Terman)—are packed with exciting illustrations and follow a similar format: the reader is the main character and decides how the action will unfold and even end by making a variety of choices throughout the book. An example from The Cave of Time:

You are lost in a dimly lit cave. Gradually you can make out two passages. One curves downward to the right; the other leads upward to the left. It occurs to you that the one leading down may go to the past and the one leading up may go to the future. If you take the left branch, turn to p. 20. If you take the right branch, turn to p. 61. If you walk outside the cave again, turn to p. 21.

In a series of five choices this reader found herself following the cave's left passage into an underwater grotto and through a passageway leading to an island para-

dise populated by friendly natives. The final choice: Should she remain with the natives, or continue on her quest to find her old life? Wanderlust spurred her attempt to return to the Cave of Time by means of the many little doors in the various rooms, each of which had some special meaning. She finally found that the door in the living room of the house was the passage back to the life that was hers. (In another adventure she died by falling into a canyon while astride a woolly mammoth.)

Wander Under the Sea takes the reader beneath the ocean's surface where "you" are accidentally shut out of the underwater research vessel. Do you explore the immediate surroundings or search for the lost city of Atlantis? What happens depends on you. In By Balloon to the Sahara, do you trust a band of fierce warriors or a group of spacemen?

The quality of description in all three books is excellent and the plots are fast-paced to keep the reader to experience numerous daring adventures, leading to the books continuing appeal, and the endings are not predictable. The illustrations encourage exercise of the imagination. Perhaps the best recommendation comes from three readers, aged 8, 10 and 12 with whom the books were shared:

"This is the best I have read in a long time. Have you got any more books like these?"

"I've been through the cave two times already. How many ways are there to go?"

"My brothers have taken the books over on their own. Can you get a set?"

Douglas's Journey Under the Sea offers both avid and reluctant readers the opportunity to embark on storybook adventures with a level of personal involvement previously lacking. The possibilities for classroom and personal use seem limitless. Teachers and parents should be well-acquainted with these three books and those to follow in the series.

Susan L. Stein

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee


Who has not lain on the ground gazing at the sky imagining familiar animals, objects, and faces in the shifting cloud formations. The same imagination is captured in Lee Bennett Hopkins' pairing of John Earl's black and white photographs of strident drapery and splayed wood pieces with twenty-three-word sentences. The raw and lonely life of "The Lone Dog" by Irene McLeod is suggested in a photograph of a dog's footprints in the sand and a dog on a leash. The dog's perspective captures the tone of the poem and serve as an added metaphor for its central thought—a very pleasing combination.

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This is the story of author David Khaderian's mother, Veron Dumehjian, a story reflective of what happened to the Armenians in Turkey in the early years of this century. Nearly two million Armenians lost their lives and others suffered great hardship and deprivation. This part of history is little known to most American children. In this book, it is told with a human interest which explains why the plight of Veron and the second person style reads well aloud, as if Veron were telling the story to the reader. Poet David Khaderian must have heard his mother tell the story to him during his growing up years in the mid 1900s.

The years that followed became more and more difficult. Veron's father moved her back to Turkey, to Birjik, which was again free. When he died, nine year old Veron got a job carrying water to earn food for herself and some Armenian women. Reunited with some of her family in Aleppo at age ten, she then entered an orphanage in order to go to school. Eventually, she got home to Aaziza to live with her beloved grandma and a few other surviving relatives. Upon arrival, she was taken to a marriage and at age sixteen eventually agreed to marry Melkon Khaderian in America as his mail order bride.

The nine years of Veron's life related in this book were years filled with all the horrors of living in a war situation as well as the occasional small joys of a few weeks of feeling safe, of being able to go to school, of finding friends, or of having a new dress. The book provides the opportunity for the reader to enjoy a good story as well as to admire the courage of this young girl and experience the problems she faced as well as the small joys of everyday living which she occasionally had.

Bette J. Pelota

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee


The runaway could be an important figure in adolescent literature. Huck Finn and Holden Caulfield suggest some of the possibilities. In recent stories about runaways, however, authors have realized these possibilities only in small part. They have tended to use the runaway story for documentary purposes—to catalogue the hardships and dangers the world holds in store for young people who strike out on their own. Go
Ask Alice and Steffie Can't Come Out to Play are cases in point. In each the runaway's ordeal is horrid, but the runaway herself is dim-witted and uninteresting: a good victim, nothing more.

Dave Run is a cut above these, though it too has its documentary side. Dave Hendry, fifteen, hitching to Colorado where he hopes to find his father, crosses paths with a teen hoarder, a kindly waitress who gives him free food and the clap, a bright black cohort who can't get a job, a street-wise M.D. in a public health clinic, a rich kid whose besotted parents ignore him—mention only a few. All these people, like Dave, are outsiders. Outsiders, the story suggests, find comfort only with other outsiders.

The documentary on outsiders is presented in a special way. Each character narrates his or her part of Dave's story; Dave tells no part of it. Some speakers sound as if they are delivering set pieces, but the overall effect of the method is good. It permits several speakers to suggest interesting untold stories of their own, and that suggested background gives depth to the whole.

The story is told in a manner which Dave has no holden, but neither is he a hapless victim. He is gentle yet resolute: he does what he does on purpose. He fends well for himself until he is trapped in a small town jail and seems doomed to be sent home for juvenile correction. He hangs himself then; and Everly suggests that at least does not deny that, under the circumstances, he makes the better bad choice.

Richard Western
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

FOR TEACHERS


This is, as the subtitle claims, an informal textbook. It is a book of basics—the essential techniques of fiction and how they function.

As fiction editor of Enquire, The Saturday Evening Post, and Audience magazines, Rust Hills has published and many contemporary writers—Haller, Capote, Bellow, Malamud, Roth, Updike. He read them, he talked to them, he edited them. Hills also taught short story writing and edited many anthologies. Thus, he claims, "I really do think I know something about it now." And he does.

Writing in General and the Short Story in Particular is not a formula book or a writer's trusty handbook. Hills talks to the writer who has 'an originality of perception and utterance' as he analyzes the components of a short story-point of view, plot, character, setting, theme. But it is also a book for teachers and students, readers as well as writers. Hills is a knowledgeable critic; his reflections offer insights to the reader of literature.

Moreover, his writing abounds in humor and illustrations and good sense and simple statements of profound ideas:

"A short story is dynamic, "tells of something that happened to somebody." A sketch is static, "tells of a character or place or whatever" that remains constant.

"Character and action are like the subject and the verb in a sentence. You must have both character (subject) and plot (verb) and know the significance of what happened to the character (the meaning or thought)."

"Slick fiction... always partakes of the daytime, while quality fiction... always partakes of the night dream."

Your first decision as you start the book, is a desire to reorganize and consolidate, to bring order and structure to a picareseque piece. For this volume of only 176 pages is divided into 58 chapters. As you read, however, you become aware of a cumulative effect—a consistent, developing philosophy, and from these seeming segments emerges a sense of the whole. The book flows as it comes; is, in effect, what Hills maintains a successful contemporary short story should demonstrate—a harmonious relationship of all its aspects.

University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

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