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TO: Readers of the Wisconsin English Journal
FROM: Tim Hirsch, Editor
RE: The Future of the Journal

With this issue, my short stint as Editor comes to an end. Last week at the WCET Conference in Appleton, David Schaalma, the WCET Publications Committee Chair, told me that two well-qualified candidates have expressed an interest in the job. I am just a little disappointed. I had almost begun to hope that nobody would consider taking the job, and WCET would have to beg me to stay on. Several people have told me that they enjoyed reading the last issue, and those pleasant comments turned my head; I was tempted to ask if I could continue as Editor. But then I remembered that the Associate Editor, Marlo Welshons, graduates this month. I would be on my own. I remembered how much I have had to rely on her, and so I also recalled why I had decided not to stay on. I remain an amateur.

I am going to take this chance, however, to say a few things about what I would like to see the Journal become. From our “Readership Survey” and from informal comments, I have reached the conclusion that the Journal can do a better job of serving the profession if we make it more lively, perhaps even “wild.” I think it could be a place where we talk with each other about the important issues in our professions, not only in scholarly articles and traditional literary genre, but also in other less conventional forms—cartoons, limericks, debates, interviews, opinion pieces, songs, anything you can dream up. In my judgment, the Journal should be open to every voice in our profession. In some cases that might mean we sacrifice decorum and/or scholarly rigor. Certainly it should mean that the Journal include voices and positions against which the editors vigorously stand. I am going to recommend to the new Editor(s) that they print a disclaimer at the front of each issue. Something like this: “The opinions expressed in this issue reflect neither the views of the editors of the Wisconsin English Journal nor the official positions of the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English. We intend for the Wisconsin English Journal to serve as a forum for anyone who has something to say about our profession.”

If you have a manuscript, send it to me as soon as possible. I am going to make a deal with the new Editors that they find a place in future issues for every piece that I have accepted before I officially turn over the Journal files, probably August 1992. This might be your last chance to sneak in something wild.

May all of us be granted good luck and serenity in these closing weeks of another academic year. I hope your summer season brings you rest and renewal.
The Economics of Education

Thomas A. Lund

School boards would have us believe their primary concern is our students. That everything else is secondary. It's a noble image but an inaccurate one, I'm afraid. I submit that the one over-riding concern of school boards is economy. "Economy" has become the super-duper noun in education. The most for the least money. At any rate that's the theory. But more often than not it simply turns out to be the least for the least money. You get, after all, exactly what you pay for most of the time.

Economy doesn't decrease class sizes.

Economy doesn't award teachers salaries commensurate with their worth in society.

Economy doesn't air-condition the multi-level steamrooms that most of our schools become two or three months every academic year.

Economy doesn't supply staffs with the latest in education hardware and software.

When I began teaching English in 1956, my classes averaged 25 students. When I retired 32 years later, they averaged 30-plus. Economy is mostly not progress.

In 1988 when I hung it up, my annual salary had reached an astronomical $39,000. Economy can be demanding.

The first school I taught at was a brand new edifice, handsome inside and out, but alas, with poor ventilation, and of course, no air-conditioning to create a kinder environment for students and teachers during those hot spring and early fall weeks. Room temperatures in the eighties and nineties for days
at a time were not uncommon in my room. Half the classrooms abutted an attractive but radiant courtyard in the center of the building where temperatures often soared beyond the hundred-degree mark, adding to our discomfort. We referred to the courtyard as “Death Valley.” Economy, as often as not, lacks compassion.

The last school I taught at, our Merchant of Venice playbooks were terribly old and rickety, and rife with every kind of planted obscenity imaginable. Some so spectacular as to at times make it virtually impossible to concentrate on Shakespeare. Not surprising, I suppose, when your department’s annual operating budget is set down in the middle of, say the athletic department’s budget; it fades into insignificance. Economy creates glaring inequities.

If indeed the chief concern of school boards were our students, class loads would long ago have diminished to realistically manageable levels: I remember one year toward the close of my career when our assistant administrator spent the better part of the first quarter in front of a computer just transplanting students from one classroom to another so that all classrooms would be more or less equally stuffed.

Teachers’ salaries would have attained levels worthy of professionals: My first few years of teaching I should have gone bankrupt but for a summertime job I got cutting the grass beneath the city’s water towers. I kept that job for nine years.

By now it would have become unthinkable to construct school buildings without air-conditioning or adequate ventilation: The last school I taught at, referred to above, had been “remodeled” at a cost of $8,500,000, which included a “cooling system” that functioned, well, inadequately. Especially problematic since many of its new classrooms were without windows. My room was essentially a vault. No economy there, I can tell you, but the taxpayers, in referendum, had opted for the 8.5-million repair job after two years earlier rejecting, in referendum, an entirely new complex for $7,000,000.

And academic budgets would be given proper priority: Here let it suffice to say that in that same school, at least one year I recall our English Department budget was $75.00—a typical figure, by the way.

Can school boards change? I suppose so. But it’s not likely, for all school boards are subject to the whims of city and state governments who, in the last analysis, control the purse strings. To most politicians, education is fair game and when faced with budget crunches, one of their first moves is to cut education appropriations, which invariably results in reduced teaching staffs, increased class sizes, elimination of programs once thought to be enriching, or perhaps even essential, but which now have suddenly become, after all, dispensable.

Economy where education is concerned, above all, is expedient.

*Thomas A. Lund* is retired and residing in Milwaukee
The Golden Apple

Richard Halle

The writing of "The Golden Apple" was incorporated in my 7th and 8th grade Nancie Atwell writing workshop at Marshfield Junior High. The first draft, painfully done on a yellow legal pad while holding a pen in my fist, was written during class time as my students wrote their entries for the Midstate Epilepsy Contest "Everyone is Different." Each of the seven drafts was proofread by students. The final edit was completed by a co-worker, Guen Sisson. As we packaged the entries, my 8th grade class was positive that I would win. They had seen the tears, pain, and emotion that went into my essay about "being different." The winning prize of $50 purchased sub sandwiches, fruit trays, and soda for my 8th grade class. We celebrated "being different" with a party.

I started the process of learning all I could about the surgery that took place on June 24th, 1991. After twenty-two hours of surgery and four-plus more hours of surgery on July 3rd, I started my twenty-one days of hospital recovery. Each day was a challenge. Learning how to hear using only one ear, how to walk and regain my balance, how to deal with a face paralyzed on one side, and how to use a right hand that has nerve damage are a few of the handicaps that I am trying to adjust to.

September 3rd was the day I was working toward—the first day of school, the first day to face the students with my punk haircut and physical problems, all the time trying to hide the psychological fear of the strange looks I would receive.

A week before the start of school, I had an appointment with both surgeons. The doctors determined that I could claim disability of 50 to 100 percent, but I wanted to try teaching full time before I accepted any disability.

The day arrived. As each class arrived I explained what happened to me. I told the students that with their help I would teach them rather than turn them over to a substitute teacher. I said, "We will learn together, and by the end of the year, we will all have learned something."

Last week my 8th grade class arrived with a gift. I said it wasn't my birthday or any special day. They said it was a special day because I was their "favorite teacher." Inside the brightly wrapped package was a golden apple—a bell—for me. An apple for the teacher.

This week I invited two other handicapped people to join in presenting the background for the handicap assignment. Cole has Down Syndrome and Shelly has the ability of a six-year-old. Together we talked to the class about handicapped people and what we can accomplish.

When my 7th grade class arrived for fourth hour, I asked them, "Who does not know a handicapped person?" Several students raised their hands.

Several other students whispered to them, "You know Mr. Halle don't you?" The hands went down.

With joy in my heart I realized that some people did not consider my visual deformities and hearing loss handicaps. The students have learned to speak louder and in the right ear. They have learned to speak until I hear where the sound is coming from. They understand that because I hold a pen in my fist the writing is sometimes difficult to read. Help lifting anything is just an "ask" away.

The miracle of the golden apple has made my whole being
ring with sounds of joy and the words from “Music of the Night.”

Help me encourage my students to make music as I share, grow, and learn to deal with my disability. My soul takes flight as I overcome the handicaps I must learn to live with and make them realize that by example a handicap can be a learning tool.

Richard Hall teaches English 7-8 and is the Writing Coordinator for K-8 for the Marshfield School System. His story, “The Golden Apple,” won first place in the Midstate Epilepsy contest, “Everyone is Different.”

An older black lab and a golden lab pup greet me on a grey November morning when I drive up to the ranch/farmhouse of Jeanne Hovde, author of several children’s action/adventure books. Situated on a small private lake near Birchwood, Wisconsin, the Hovde’s home immediately reveals a sense of family; group pictures are prominent, as is a wonderfully comfortable “lived-in” atmosphere.

Although Mrs. Hovde’s twelve children (yes, twelve!) are all grown, there were two young men in her living room whom she introduced as boyfriends of her two youngest daughters, who go to school at UW-Eau Claire. They were there to begin the ritual of “getting ready for deer hunting” that has become a holiday season in itself in northern Wisconsin. It was obvious that she still enjoys having young people around. Jeanne Hovde’s books reflect her commitment to family, her strong spirituality, and her understanding of children. Her first book, Winter of the White-Tail Buck, is the story of a boy who gets his first buck with his grandfather’s gun, and is patterned somewhat on the experiences of one of her own sons. Twelve-year-old Jed learns to deal with disappointment, makes some mistakes that cost his family money, and ultimately makes a sacrifice for his twin sister. The emphasis is on family life, Christian values, and choosing what is right.

Bobcat, her second book, also centers on a strong family unit and again the main character is a young boy whose values are challenged when he must make a difficult decision.

In A Horse Named Cinnamon (later renamed A Horse for Cathy)
the protagonist is a girl who deals with the same types of frustrations and disappointments. Again, the theme is the development of character within the context of a loving family. This book has been marketed in Europe and translated into German and Finnish.

As we settle down at Mrs. Hovde’s dining room table with a view of the lake and the fields beyond, the young men disappeared; I turned on my tape recorder and began learning from this fascinating, warm, gentle woman.

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ME: Were your children all at home when you began writing?
HOVDE: Yes, all twelve of them.

ME: So when did you begin your first book?

HOVDE: In 1974. But, you see, I always knew someday I’d write a book. Of course I had put it on the back burner. I mean, I was occupied with children and farming.

ME: Did you always write full length books, or did you write short stories first?

HOVDE: No, I always wrote full length books. We had several children in grade school and some of them were having trouble with reading, so I read to them at night. And then, I thought how much they enjoyed the stories I told them about things that had happened to them. You know, stories about themselves. So, I thought if I wrote them down, they might be more interested in reading. So I did that. I wrote a few little stories, and sure enough they were interested.

One of the boys wanted to take them to school and I said, “Oh, no, these are just for us.” But he took them anyway and told me later that the teacher read them to the class and the other kids liked them, too. And he said, “I think you should write your book” because they all knew I wanted to write a book. So that’s how I kind of got started. The other kids volunteered to eat peanut butter and canned peaches, and really encouraged me to get started.

ME: How did you make time, though, with all those kids around?

HOVDE: You just make it. I was writing in my mind all the time. When I was washing dishes, anything. Any time you’re nice and warm is a good time to think and write. By the time I sat down I would know what I wanted to say. It wasn’t hard. In fact, writing the first book was the easiest. I would write a chapter and try it out on the kids. And just watch them. If they started to screech or nudge each other, I just knew I had to do something differently. I was quite confident by the time I had that first one finished, I guess, for that reason. If my kids liked it, I thought others would.

ME: Did you write as a kid?

HOVDE: Oh, yes. I loved to write. I remember in third grade we were supposed to write a theme of composition and the teacher was very wise and put several titles on the board that we could choose from, or we could write on something else, and I picked out “Aunt Mary’s Flower Garden.” The reason that I did was because I always had to work in the garden. My sister did the ironing and I worked in the garden. I loved gardening, but it was always vegetables and I wanted a flower garden. I could picture how my flower garden would look, so I knew just what to write to describe it. And when I got done I just felt so nice and warm and good and I just knew someday I would write a book.

ME: Do you or did you keep a diary or journal?

HOVDE: Not really, no. No. At different times I’ve written ideas down, but once you get started, I don’t think ideas are a problem. ME: Then how did you go about developing your plot and characters?

HOVDE: Well, after the kids really got after me about getting started, I thought I’d have to figure out a way to give myself some direction, so I bought two books, Writing for Children and Teenagers and Writers Market. I also had a subscription to Writer’s Digest magazine and in it there was a notice that this particular company, David C. Cook, was looking for stories for the eight to twelve-year-old age group, twenty-three to thirty thousand words, good wholesome stories that would reflect Christian values. And I thought, “Oh! That’s for me!” Of course, I didn’t realize that I was swimming in this great big sea. I hadn’t narrowed my book to an age group, I hadn’t thought of word length, and the perspective I’m sure would have been much similar, but I hadn’t focused it. But anyway, I thought, “That’s what I’ll try for.” I had already decided that the next story I was going to write would be about my one son who had gotten his first deer with his great-great grandfather’s gun. I thought that was interesting so I wanted to build my story around that. I called it Winter of the White-Tail Buck.

ME: And Bobcat?

HOVDE: Well, there had been a bobcat around, and the children had a lot of adventures, and you just have to come up with a way to tie them together. I was out picking blueberries, and as I said, when you get warm, that’s when your ideas hit you. I was
out there in the warm sun, doing
something I didn’t have to think
about, like washing dishes. I got
this idea, so I ran to the truck
and found an old envelope in the
glove compartment; I wrote one
chapter. That wasn’t the first
chapter, it was the blueberry
chapter; you don’t always start
at the beginning, but just getting
started is the thing. Once you
get started...but you have to
think about it until you just have
to write it.

ME: Now how did you go about
actually getting
published? You sent a complete
manuscript in to Cook?
HOVDE: Yes, see, actually they
were sponsoring a contest. So I
sent it in, and then I kept
pondering and wondering, and
I’m the kind of person who
wants to take disappointments
by myself. So when I went to the
mailbox and the whole thing
came back, (it wasn’t the small
envelope I was hoping for), and I
had to go past the garage where
my husband was working. So I
kind of hid it against my side.
When I got inside, I opened it
and just kind of flipped off the
cover letter and underneath was
a manuscript. But it wasn’t my
manuscript. So, I grabbed a cup
of coffee and sat down and read
it, and it was very good, but then
I thought, “What am I going to
do?” So I called the company
and the lady said that they had
had an awful mixup and that

story was in the finals as well as
mine. I was so delighted and of
course my confidence grew as
she said it would be only a
couple more weeks.

Well, when it finally came,
we were on our way to town and
picked up the mail and I got the
whole manuscript back and my
heart just sank...all this work I
had done just gone down the
drain. I read the cover letter and
my husband said, “What are you
going to do?” and I said,
“Nothing. Just feel sorry for
myself all day long.” And that’s
exactly what I did. But that
night before I went to bed I sat
down and read the letter again.
It said, “While you did not win
our contest, we are still
interested in publishing your
story if you will rewrite some
areas.” They gave me some
ideas so I thought, “I shouldn’t
feel bad about this at all! I
should feel really good.”

ME: So how did you go about
revising?

HOVDE: For the first thing, I
had given Jed two little sisters.
I don’t know why I did, because
several times the book I was
using said to use only the
number of characters you need.
It was kind of hard in a way,
because when one talked I had
to think of something for the
other one to say. But that didn’t
seem to phase me; I mean, I went
on about that. Until the night
before when I was going to type
the final draft, I sat down and
reread the whole thing, and the
one little sister seemed to be
excess baggage. So I decided as I
went along, I rolled the two
characters into one. But the
Cook editors said, for one thing,
the age of Gretchen seems to be
rather unclear, and brother, was
my face red. For one thing, I
knew that sometimes she was in
a high chair, and other times she
said something much too
advanced for a child still in a
high chair. But, I knew I could
fix that. That’s very fixable.
And another thing they said is
that Jed seemed kind of mature
for his age. Well, I could fix that,
too. For instance, when the
grandfather comes and Jed is
eager to give up his room...I
thought that a kid his age
probably wouldn’t be happy to
have to sleep somewhere else so
his grandfather could have his
bed. So, I made it that he hated
to give up his own room
downstairs, but he did...he
thinks about it. And in addition,
I added a situation where he
makes this irreversible mistake
that costs money, and I thought
that would take care of him, and
apparently it did, because they
accepted it.

ME: Did you have to revise
Bobcat, too?
HOVDE: No, they accepted that
just as I wrote it.

ME: And did you use
experiences of your own

children?

HOVDE: Yes, and some
experiences that I have had,
personally.

ME: What other books have you
written?

HOVDE: Oh, there’s A Horse for
Cathy. It was first published as
A Horse Named Cinnamon. This
one has been published in
Germany and Great Britain and
in Finland. These are in
hardcover, but the book first
came out as a Pennypincher
Series. It only cost $1.75.

ME: Did you get to choose the
illustrator?

HOVDE: No, and it’s very
interesting. Like in Bobcat, the
boy never really saw the Bobcat
so I was wondering how they
would do the cover. But they go
into a lot of detail and it is very
good. See, they put the animal
kind of behind.

ME: Do you use a typewriter or
a computer?

HOVDE: I always write
everything first in longhand. I
have a computer and you can do
a lot of things with it and it’s
invaluable later on, but when I
start, I don’t want anything
mechanical.

ME: Do you ever go to schools
to talk to kids?

HOVDE: I love it! I tell them,
“All you have to know is what’s
happening and how you feel
about it.”

ME: This copy of Bobcat came
from our 7-12 library and you
can see that it's very much used. I know it was written for younger students, but it seems to appeal to a wide range of ages. Also, I noticed that this book has a definite Christian emphasis. Do all of your books?

HOVDE: Yes. Because of this: I am very aware of my spiritual nature. I am not primarily a physical person. I love to think and I love to communicate, and that's the spirit, you know. I could still communicate if I was in a wheelchair. That's very important to me. My connection with nature is pretty miserable and I can't disassociate from that.

ME: But you seem to know so much about farming, and how the machinery works and what will happen if something goes wrong. Did you grow up on a farm?

HOVDE: Well, I got to work the machinery when I got out here. I said to my husband when we got married that if I had to make the living, I wouldn't be farming. But he wanted to, and I felt he ought to be able to do what he wanted to do. A person that is doing something that they don't like to do is not a happy person. And I was certainly happy out here. I mean, I had a wonderful time raising all these children.

ME: One last thing. Do you have some wonderful advice for unpublished authors?

HOVDE: Yes. You just have to start. You can think about your stories for so long, but nothing will ever happen unless you put it down on paper.

At this point the tape stopped and I had promised myself and her that the interview would not last longer than the tape.

Mrs. Hovde did say that she will come to schools to talk to and with students. Her fee is $50.00 for one class period.

While visiting after the formal interview, Mrs. Hovde shared her views on commitment and spiritual growth. Guidepost has published a personal experience story and she is now working on an article dealing with spirituality.

As I drove away, I thought about the interview and decided that the view from Jeanne Hovde's living room window reflects this remarkable woman's outlook on life: the farm buildings...practical and functional..."You do what needs to be done"; the lake and surrounding hills...spiritual..."Don't be afraid to dream, to reach within yourself."

Nora L. Gerber teaches at Chetek High School

Teaching Shakespeare

D. Douglas Waters

Recent critical theory has made important contributions to Shakespeare scholarship and has made it fashionable to write about alternative Shakespeares such as a new historicist Shakespeare, many feminist Shakespeares, psychoanalytic or semiotic Shakespeares, a deconstructionist Shakespeare, and a Marxist Shakespeare. These approaches make the teaching of Shakespeare more difficult, more challenging, and more exciting than it was for me two decades ago. As an alternative to the old and new alternative Shakespeares, the Shakespeare I teach is a secular humanist and a Renaissance dramatist; I teach neither the aristocratic "gentle" Will Shakespeare of early scholarship nor the present-day activist Shakespeare with subtexts accommodating new historicists, feminists, deconstructionists, psychoanalysts, and Marxists.

Though I admit that there is hardly anything more interesting than arguing about interpreting Shakespeare, here I shall not engage in argumentation. For one thing, I shall not contend, "My Shakespeare can lick you Shakespeare, or my Shakespeare can lick all the recent, alternative Shakespeares." Neither shall I argue against any particular critical approach to Shakespeare. Instead, I shall explain the nature of the Shakespeare curriculum in my department, the approach and methods I use in teaching, and the relationship of these elements to the various alternative Shakespeares.

At the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire we have three Shakespeare courses: English 757, open only to graduate students; English 356/556 and English 357/557, double-numbered courses which by definition are open to both graduates and undergraduates including non-English majors and non-English minors or general education students.
These two double-numbered courses are taught each semester, usually with an enrollment of 25 to 35 students per course. Either English 356/556 or English 357/557 can fulfill the three-hour requirement for English majors and minors, and the other course can be taken as an elective by English majors and minors. In order to make this plan work, my Shakespeare colleagues and I agreed to select for each course seven different core plays and allow the individual teacher of a given course to choose 3 or 4 additional plays to teach as time permits. For example, the core plays in 356/556 are Richard II, Merchant of Venice, Much Ado About Nothing, All’s Well That Ends Well, Hamlet, Othello, and The Winter’s Tale, but the core plays for 357/557 are 1 Henry IV, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Measure for Measure, King Lear, Macbeth, and The Tempest. So, as anyone can see, these courses do not duplicate each other; neither course is a prerequisite for the other. We chose these particular plays because they are fairly representative histories, comedies, tragedies, tragi-comedies, and tragic-comic romances and because they are equally as good (or equally as bad as some recent interpretive communities may regard them) as the corresponding plays in the same genres in the other core group; we wanted, and we still want, neither course to be necessarily better overall nor less interesting overall than the other course.

In my teaching as well as in my critical writings on Shakespeare’s works, I take a combination historicist/formalist approach. Using ideas in history, or the synchronic spectrum, from Aristotle to Shakespeare, I study his works partially in the light of the social, political, cultural, and religious contexts of Shakespeare’s own day. But as a critic and teacher I am also partially conditioned by diachronic processes, involvements in understandings of history and culture in the twentieth century. So my approach through history of ideas and dramatic form assumes the importance of ideas in history both before and since Shakespeare’s time if they help us discover and understand key aspects of the form and meaning of the plays themselves. And because of our diachronic involvement in our own culture and because of the debatable nature of almost every aspect of Shakespeare’s dramaturgy, almost any critical approach can be intellectually respectable and is, in fact, critically rewarding. This is why we have, and shall continue to have, such alternative Shakespeares as semiotic, structuralist, feminist, psychoanalytic, deconstructionist, and/or Marxist Shakespeares. My emphasis on genre and form concentrates on Shakespeare’s use of ideas in history and of such dramatic forms as histories, tragedies, comedies, tragi-comedies, and tragic-comic romances. My approach also is supplemented by what traditional scholarship has taught us about Shakespeare’s role as a dramatic author; it is also cognizant of the audience’s role. When I interpret for example a given tragedy’s dominant impact upon me as an individual, my comments about such formal aspects as catharsis as clarification of human experience easily overlap with an audience-response or reader-response approach. On any given issue for example we as individual spectators or readers can never accept a given interpretation if it goes against the grain of what we might call our intuitive insights when we watch or reread a given play. There is of course a very good reason for holding out for the importance of a reader-response approach—ultimately it is the spectator or reader who makes meaning out of one’s synchronic and diachronic interaction with the Shakespearean text.

That dramatic form and meaning in Shakespeare’s tragedies, comedies, tragi-comic romances, etc., are neither monolithic nor static but dynamic and that our interpretations of form and meaning are always tentative at best, have been demonstrated by such critics as Muir, Nevo, Hartwig, and Mowat, to name only a few. Throughout each semester I remind my students that the most comprehensive handbook on all critical approaches to Shakespeare, both old and new, is Stanley Wells’ edition of The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare Studies (1986).

Key importance, in my approach to Shakespeare, is give to the dramatist’s adaptation of Aristotle’s concept of mimesis or artistic representation of human beings on a stage, a view that has been contested but not disposed of in our time. The best studies of mimesis in Hamlet for example are the historical critic Roland Mushat Frye’s The Renaissance Hamlet: Issues and Responses in 1600, the structuralist critic Howard Felperin’s Shakespearean Representation: Mimesis and Modernity in Elizabethan Tragedy (1977), A. D. Nuttall’s A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality (1983) (a structuralist discussion that, I think, slights genres and their importance), and the Marxist structuralist Robert Weimann’s “Mimesis and Hamlet” (1985).

Catharsis as clarification of human experience in Aristotle’s Poetics is the focus of works by Leon Golden (1962 and 1984), O.
Shakespeare fits Richard III into Polonius’s classification of genres as “tragic-comical-historical-pastoral.” Its tragic aspects are what have been traditionally referred to as de casibus tragedy, the fall of a prince from a high position of power to destruction and death; and its “comical” traits are prominent in Acts I, II, and III. We respond intellectually to Richard’s comic traits and emotionally with hardly anything approaching pity until possibly near the end of the play, when many spectators or readers may not respond to as a tragedy, as I do.

I interpret Richard II, which is much more powerful tragedy than Richard III, as the tragedy of a weak king’s presumption about his kingship by divine right. I respond to Macbeth as the tragedy that gives Shakespeare’s most frightful vision of evil as its own kind of punishment: the hero’s breaking the laws of nature and nations brings retribution not at the supernatural level but at the natural level and the national level. Macbeth’s moral degeneration is part of his natural punishment. Othello, I contend, is the tragedy neither of perverted love, the Moor’s sexual impotency, sadism, homosexuality, nor racism, but the tragedy of a noble black man destroyed partially by external circumstances (connected with Iago and the fatal handkerchief) and partially by his excessive trust or credulity in Iago. I usually evaluate limitations of psychoanalytic interpretations of Hamlet (including the notorious Oedipus complex) as well as some of the excessive theological treatments of the play. I view it mainly as the tragedy of a noble prince’s preoccupation with revenge as private, blood vengeance. Hamlet’s duty was to carry out revenge as a part of public justice by killing Claudius for the good of the state of Denmark. But his natural preoccupation with personal vengeance caused him to spare Claudius by prayer, to kill Polonius by mistake, and thus partially bring about his own destruction and death.

During the semester I give a few handouts containing commonplace theories of history, tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, and tragi-comic romance. In this context I usually show that study of literary sources and influence can help us understand for example such forms as tragedy in As You Like It, tragi-comedy in All’s Well That Ends Well and Measure for Measure, and tragi-comic romance in The Winter’s Tale. Adapting Thomas Lodge’s Rosalynde or Euphues’ Golden Legacy (1590) in As You Like It, Shakespeare either dispenses with such external action as the war plot or has some of it, as in the instance of Duke Frederick’s conversion, to occur offstage. His dramaturgy handles effectively the main theme of criticism of life by having Touchstone weigh the strengths and weaknesses of the forest of Arden and by having Jacques ridicule it. Duke Senior idealizes the forest, and Corin, the shepherd, praises it. Touchstone also criticizes the love of Rosalind and Orlando, parodies it in his lustful relationship with the country girl Audrey, and spoofs the shepherd Corin’s praise of the country life. So the comic form of the play effectively interweaves many thoughtful aspects with the main love story of Rosalind and Orlando, the story that dramatizes comically the theme of love, courtship, and marriage. The story of Helena’s love for Bertram in All’s Well That Ends Well is influenced by the story of Giletta of Narbona in Boccacio’s Decameron and in William Painter’s English translation in The Palace of Pleasure (1566–67, 1575). Shakespeare’s tragi-comic form fuses unpleasant elements usually seen in comedy and pleasant elements ordinarily seen in tragedy, but the situation is not a tragic one since Bertram backs down in his willingness to compromise by marrying Helena when the King so commands,
nor is it in itself pleasant when Helena catches Bertram in his lies and still accepts his promise to “love her dearly, ever, ever, dearly” (V.iii.316). Though this tragi-comedy has many disturbing elements, making it difficult for us to sympathize with Helena or Bertram, from her point of view the play has overall comic form partially in that for her it ends happily. After Bertram’s coerced marriage to Helena, he challenges her to get his ring off his finger, which he says he will never take off, and to show him her child fathered by him, which he says will be impossible because he will never go to bed with her. Helena’s plan for exchanging herself in Diana’s bed—the notorious bed trick—makes it possible for Helena to get his ring and to conceive his child. She outsmarts him on both counts and wins him the second time. The story of Angelo as a corrupt judge in Measure for Measure has been somewhat influenced by the story of Juriste, Eptia, and her brother Vico in Cinthio’s prose collection Hecatommithi (1565), Cinthio’s tragi-comedy Eptia (1583), and George Whetstone’s English two-part play Promos and Cassandra (1578). Shakespeare’s Duke Vincentio disguised as a Friar goes far beyond the effectiveness of any character in his analogues, even though there is a parallel king in Promos and Cassandra that helps Cassandra bring the judge to justice after he has broken his promise to spare her brother’s life in return for her sexual favors shown to the judge. It is the dramatic irony provided by the Friar-Duke’s role that gives this tragi-comedy its overall comic form through the aid the Friar brings to various characters in the course of the entire play and in the long, if not tedious, last scene. The Friar-Duke forgives many of the characters because of human weakness—such as Claudio and Juliette and Angelo—he teaches most of them the importance of tempering justice with mercy—especially Angelo and Isabella. And because of the Friar-Duke, most of the characters end up happy. Throughout the play, therefore, the Friar-Duke’s actions are objectifications of the theme of tempering justice with mercy.

As one of Shakespeare’s last plays that stress the main theme of regeneration, recognition, and reconciliation, The Winter’s Tale is a tragi-comic romance which adapts Robert Greene’s novel Pandosto, or the Triumph of the Time (1588). Shakespeare’s play is a romance in that it stresses adventure, as do Pericles, Cymbeline, and The Tempest. Whereas Greene’s emphasis in Pandosto is on tragedy in that the wife of Pandosto dies, as does the King himself, Shakespeare changes the tragic ending to a happy one for Leontes, Hermione, and their daughter Perdita, restores the royal family, and reconciles the two royal houses of Leontes and Polixenes, reestablishing their friendship and joining their two kingdoms through the marriage of Perdita and Florizel.

To help create and strengthen a dialogical teaching situation, I assign students oral reports, interpretive papers, and research papers on topics such as a semiotic Shakespeare (Serpieri), a deconstructionist Shakespeare (Norris), a Marxist Shakespeare (Wilders on the histories or Terry Eagleton on themes cutting across and ignoring genres), a psychoanalytic/deconstructionist Shakespeare (Garber), or certain feminist Shakespeares (that often overlap with many other new critical Shakespeares). With the exception of reports on feminist approaches, these reports occasionally fail to generate much class discussion unless there happen to be present English majors who have had our English 385: Critical Approaches to Literature. I often divide students into small groups and encourage them to deal with critical problems on a practical level. And, though sharing ignorance in this manner can often be very noisy and very nonproductive, sometimes the small group method really does work well in dealing with such issues as Petruchio’s chauvinistic boorishness (whether ironic or not or whether deliberately exaggerated or not) and Kate’s unexpected diacticism in the wager scene in Act V, the anti-Semitic attitude of the Christians against Shylock, the racist attitudes of the whites against the black Othello, the Roman soldierly condemnation of Cleopatra as merely a grasping, lustful courtesan instead of a woman in love, the sexuality of Isabella in Measure for Measure and the sexuality of Ophelia, Gertrude, and Hamlet, and the roles of women in the comedies. These issues often lead us back to a fresh consideration of the form and meaning of the plays.

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Cooperative Learning: Another Method to Help Handle the English Teacher's Paper Workload

Sandra A. Cavender

As much as I enjoy most aspects of teaching high school English, one disadvantage has always confounded me—the incredible number of hours required to read one composition/student/week. This dilemma has intensified with the recent budget cuts, which now give each English teacher in our district five classes of 25-32 students. The mound of papers was burying me even though I tried to stick valiantly to my self-imposed rule of returning assignments the next day.

A modification of the newest education "buzzword"—cooperative learning—has helped me to cope with the seemingly endless number of compositions. To use cooperative learning techniques gleaned at a CESA #1 one-day workshop, I modified two activities for twelfth accelerated/honors students and for tenth grade average students.

The first activity involved forming groups of three or four in my two Accelerated English 12 classes. Into each group, I placed an A student, a B student, and a C/D student. Also, I tried to arrange the groups equally by sex and race. Each group was responsible for reading and analyzing the same Shakespearean sonnets that appear in Macmillan’s English and Western Literature. To assist them in their task, they had the...
questions within the textbook and some handouts from me. As a class, we had earlier discussed the other poetry in the Renaissance unit. This small group discussion of Shakespeare's sonnets, closely monitored by me, took two class periods.

Then, each group had to choose one of two assignments that were explained in the textbook. One option was to discuss the relationship of time, love, and art in the sonnets; the other was to compare and contrast one of the Shakespearean sonnets to another sonnet by a different author from the Renaissance unit. The group was responsible for creating clusters as their prewriting activity. Most groups were able to accomplish this task within a single class period.

Groups then had the choice of individually writing parts of the composition—introduction, body paragraphs of development, and conclusion—or of writing the entire theme as a group. Since they had only three more days before the assignment had to be handed in, most groups chose to write only the introductions and conclusions as group efforts. They assigned themselves various body paragraphs, which they wrote outside of class and later peer-edited during class time.

When the day came for the final copies to be handed in, I allowed each group fifteen to twenty minutes to proofread the "finished" product. At this point, they could still make changes. Instead of twenty-eight papers to read for each class, I had only nine. Thus, I had no difficulty returning these to the groups the next day.

Most of these students said that they felt more secure in the group because they could brainstorm ideas together after helping each other to analyze the sonnets. They also said that this was a good review activity and that they learned composition techniques from each other.

The second activity I have used with English 10 average classes who have been reading short stories. Again, I placed into each group and A student, a B student, and a C/D student, and I tried to balance the groups by sex and race. To each group, I gave a different six- or seven-paragraph newspaper story about an accident, a disaster, a sports event, or some similar event.

Then each group had to develop a short story of their own based on the given newspaper story. They constructed a plotline during a prewriting activity (conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement). Because we had also talked about direct and indirect characterization as part of their short story unit, they had to write dialogue for their characters.

This activity took about two complete class periods before the students were ready to write the first draft of their stories. Because our school does not have a computer-equipped writing lab, I took the classes to the business department rooms so that they could compose their stories more quickly and efficiently on Apple computers. Although it was a noisy activity, the students enjoyed seeing their work "published" when they printed out a draft, and they corrected their mechanical errors more easily.

Again, instead of thirty papers to grade for each class, I had only ten, and I could easily return them the next day.

Although I have experienced success with these two cooperative composition activities, I would not do more than one of them in a semester. Students still need the one-on-one relationship of a teacher-guided writing experience. However, each of these activities did give me a brief respite from the "paper prison."

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Cooperative Writing: The Integration of Cooperative Learning and Process Writing

Alan Weber

One of the current buzz words bouncing around schools is collaboration. In the administrator's office it has knocked over top-down decision making routines and spawned models empowering teachers to work collaboratively with administrators on curricular issues. In the English classroom, it has overturned individualized and competitive teaching practices in favor of cooperative methods that encourage students to work together and take charge of their own learning.

The notion of cooperative learning is also popular with other content area teachers who have successfully adopted a number of collaborative schemes into their classroom instruction.

These include the Johnson and Johnson goal structure model (59), Slavin's curriculum specific programs (11), and Kagan's content-free structural approach (3). The purpose of this article is to provide teachers in the two-year college with some ideas and approaches for incorporating cooperative learning within the six stages of the writing process.

Characteristics of Cooperative Learning

Dee Dishon and Pat Wilson-O'Leary define a cooperative group as 2-5 students who have a common purpose to complete a task that includes every member of the group (1). Unlike most typical classroom groups, cooperative groups are not students completing individual work in a group setting or faster students helping slower students complete a task.

Rather, cooperative groups are characterized by shared leadership among group members who possess varying skills and capabilities. Students rely on each other as the primary source of information and help. The teacher's role is to facilitate and encourage group problem solving.

Johnson and Johnson and Kagen (1, 3) agree that there are three essential elements that distinguish cooperative learning from traditional group work. While the following characteristics are most important, not all cooperative learning lessons include all three of these key elements.

1. Individual Accountability—Each student is responsible to learn all the material.
2. Positive Interdependence—The task is structured so that each student must contribute to the task or it will be difficult or impossible for the group to reach its goal. One member cannot succeed unless the other members succeed as well. This interdependence is structured through rewards, products, materials, or roles.
3. Collaborative Skills—These are social skills which are taught, practiced, and reinforced so that students can complete a task. Some examples of collaborative skills include:
   - moving into groups quickly and quietly
   - taking turns
   - encouraging others to participate
   - asking questions
   - reaching consensus

Kagan adds two other primary elements for a cooperative lesson: Team Formation and Lesson Structuring. Team Formation describes the methods of achieving heterogeneous teams or groups. Lesson Structuring provides a number of content free frameworks for achieving group goals like concept development, classbuilding, and master.

Johnson and Johnson also add two additional characteristics: Face-to-Face Interaction and Group Processing. Face-to-Face Interaction is the interaction pattern and verbal interchange that occur when students meet eye to eye. Group Processing gives students the time and procedures to analyze how well a group is functioning.

The Writing Process

The writing process as defined by Murray (6) and Graves (14) is composed of six recursive stages that include...
exploring (prewriting), sharing, composing, revising, editing (proofreading), and publishing. It is a model which defines writing as more than a finished product or a curricular event. It is a procedure for penetrating the mystery about how writing occurs.

Why would an English teacher want to integrate these two instructional models that seem to contradict each other? Is not writing an individual, solitary effort?

The traditional view that writing is done alone in secluded retreats might be accurate for the novelist or poet who down-play audience considerations in order to emphasize their own vision and perceptions. However, most writing in English classes is communicative or expressive in purpose. The real world writing of letters, memos, proposals, and reports demand audience considerations because of their transactional or communicative function. Personal and expressive writing that seeks to help the writer form ideas and discover self is enriched when perceived as a social rather than solitary activity. While a single person might physically write down sentences, school writing begging for the input of peers and experts for topics, ideas, feedback, corrections, and formats. The stages of the writing process assure that this collaboration takes place.

Another difficulty of adopting the writing process is that the model does not fit well into large group instruction which requires everyone to be doing the same activity at the same time. The recursive nature of writing belies the sequential, deductive approach of whole group instruction, a style that more successfully breeds competitive drill and practice routines. Rather, the writing process pays higher dividends when structured in a cooperative atmosphere where students pace themselves and emerge as coaches and facilitators of student efforts, not just givers of information. Cooperative writing groups greatly enhance individual efforts and demonstrate the importance of sharing writing during the entire process.

Thus, the writing process provides an appropriate context for cooperative learning. Each of the stages allows for activities that incorporate elements of a cooperative lesson to achieve a goal. Figure 1 provides an overview of cooperative structures for each of the writing process stages.

Cooperative Writing Stages

Exploring

This stage helps students discover what they already know, generate new concepts, play around with language and meaning, and actually see what they are thinking. Gabriele Rico's clustering method is a popular and effective way for students to explore and self-select a writing topic. This method is easily modified for a cooperative team. In Team Clustering, each member is given a different color pen or marker. First, students determine a kernel concept through consensus, write it in the middle of a large piece of butcher paper or poster board, and circle it. Second, students make two associations to the kernel idea, each writing these concepts in their own circles and then passing the paper to the left or right. Third, the students go around the table and add one new connection to the words of their team members. After a minute of the round table clustering, the students briefly tell why they made a particular connection and then individually choose any association they feel strongly about and begin writing. While the colored markers allow for individual accountability, the group interaction encourages positive interdependence.

Pair Response to short expressive pieces of writing also assists students in discovering and clarifying their ideas.

Expressive writings are 6-10 minute journal entries done in class, often initiated by the teacher who provides a prompt or topic. At the conclusion of the time period, students exchange their papers with a partner and respond to a teacher-directed question. Below are several examples of questions the students might discuss with their partners.

1. "From what your partner has already written, what would you like to know more about?"
2. "If your partner decides to lengthen or finish this piece, what other ideas would you add?"

Sharing

The sharing stage of the writing process demonstrates two important points. First, it truly reveals the recursive nature of the writing process because sharing may take place before or after any other stage in the process. Sharing acts as the glue of the writing process. It holds together the creative energies of discovering, drafting, clarifying, shaping, polishing, and publishing a piece of writing. Second, sharing provides the framework for cooperative activities to take place in what is normally an individualistic endeavor. This is
the primary reason why cooperative learning functions within the writing process so well and complements students’ individual efforts. It helps students share perceptions throughout the evolution of a draft so students contribute and listen to one another.

One particular sharing technique applicable to a piece of writing in process is the Team Feedback Sheet. This is usable with most expository texts or personal narratives. The cooperative use of the Team Feedback Sheet has seven steps:

1. The teacher selects heterogeneous groups of four writers of varying abilities.
2. Students place four blank sheets of paper and a copy of the feedback sheet on top of their draft. At the top of the feedback sheet the students write an open-ended question for the reader to answer. For example, the student might write, “Why is my intro effective or ineffective?” or “Suggest an example for the ideas in the third paragraph.”
3. The teacher presents a mini-lesson on a particular social skill like how to provide constructive suggestions without criticizing or putting down a writer’s ideas.
4. Students pass the materials to their right. On one of the blank sheets students put their name and answer the questions from the feedback sheet.
5. After 10-15 minutes, the students pass the materials to their right and step 3 is repeated.
6. Students next get into pairs and discuss the feedback sheet that their partner has completed. This step encourages interdependence, since a requirement of the final paper is to include one suggestion from each responder.
7. Step 5 is repeated with the other two members of the group.

At the conclusion of the Sharing Session, students possess three in-depth responses to their writing. Twenty-five percent of the students’ evaluation is determined by their verbal contributions to the other members of the team.

Composing

While sharing activities often incorporate the three basic elements of cooperative learning, composing activities exemplify the additional element of a common goal or product.

One cooperative composing structure is a variation on what Kagan refers to as the Round-table (11:4). Each student in turn writes one line or section of a story, poem, or expository piece and then passes it to the person on his or her left. This procedure continues until the writing goes to all group members. A simultaneous round table has each student begin a piece of writing and passing it to group members.

A variation of this activity is the Collaborative Poem. In this instance, students in groups of three or four volunteer their ideas for a highly structured poem like a haiku, diamante, or cinquain with the stipulation that they must contribute at least one line to the poem. In both of the above examples the instructor teaches a social skill like encouraging others to participate. Specific group members observe and record member participation for task completion and social interaction.

A third structure is Dialoguing. Students form pairs and write an imaginary interview between a radio announcer and a well-known literary, historical, or popular personality. Each character should have the same number of lines and attempt to make the listener “see” the ideas through strong details, images, and comparisons. The students may individually take the role of a single character or mutually compose the lines of both characters depending on the individual accountability desired.

Revising

Revising is an opportunity that helps students rethink and organize their paper. Revision literally helps students re-see their thoughts and change the form and content of their writing. It allows students to add, delete, move, or imbibe existing or new ideas. Students often find revising a difficult task. One reason is that without a computer, students have to recopy the entire paper for even minor changes. A second reason is that effective revision is based upon the writer’s ability to see thoughts with some perspective, as an objective reader.

A cooperative revising exercise that addresses these two difficulties is a variation of the Jigsaw developed by Aronson and others. Jigsaw Revision has 5 steps:

1. Students individually complete a ten minute piece of writing on a topic about which they have some shared experience. For example, the teacher might assign the class to write about characters in a story they all read, about what they say on a field trip, or about a recent film seen in class.
2. Students are placed in heterogeneous groups of three.
3. Each group creates one product that has at least three ideas from the individual pieces. Groups are allowed to add new thoughts, reorganize the structure, imbibe descriptions, and delete previous statements.
4. Student complete their task by cutting out the appropriate
phrases, sentences, or sections from their individual writing and scotch taping them onto the group master copy.

5. Students share their final products with the class. This revision structure forces students to re-see a piece of writing and learn how other writers expand upon, organize, and refine similar details or ideas. It assures positive interdependence by jigsawing individual work into a common product. It guarantees individual accountability by having students first write their own accounts, which can then be turned in with the group paper.

Another revision strategy that depends upon collaboration and sharing is the Fishbowl, as described by Thomas and Steinberg (24-35). This classbuilding structure encourages peer “response” to writing in progress and designated for revision. The procedure asks for one volunteer to read his or her draft aloud to a group of four or five students who sit in the middle of the room (the fishbowl). The rest of the class sits in a larger circle surrounding them.

First, the volunteer reads the draft aloud. Second, the entire class submits questions to the volunteer, who selects ones that she feels are appropriate. Fishbowl members write their responses and then orally discuss these questions. The writer can join the conversation, ask more questions, or offer additional information. Next, the entire class comments in writing about the session’s effectiveness and makes suggestions for improving the group feedback process.

**Editing**

Editing involves correcting the mechanics and grammatical usage in a paper. Students often consider this proofreading stage the most tedious of the writing process. However, there are cooperative editing strategies that make this task easier for most writers.

One way is through Peer Proofreading. Lois Rosen describes this collaborative experience as a method that permits learning by both writer and editor (62-66). Students working in pairs confer over the errors in each paper and then must agree on the correction. Individual accountability is built into the process by having both the editor and writer initial the corrections so the teacher can evaluate the skills each student possesses. The teacher resolves any disagreements usually in the form of a mini-lesson, which teaches common mechanical problems within the context of the students’ real writing, rather than in the isolation of workbooks exercises.

A second cooperative proofreading technique is a two part strategy called the Squad System. In part one, squads of five students are assigned specific roles: a leader, secretary, sergeant-at-arms, and two readers. The leader of each squad demonstrates superior (or slightly less) proofreading skills. Each squad draws three chairs close together. In the center sits the leader, on each side the secretary and sergeant. The two readers stand behind the leader’s shoulders.

The first paper of the squad is placed on the leader’s chair arm. The leader has the members of the group choose a specific grammatical area to check like spelling, punctuation, capitalization, sentence completeness, or word usage. (The teacher may assign these skills to squad members). The secretary records the responses of each member for individual accountability and the sergeant keeps the group on task. The leader rules on the legality of mistakes and corrections if a dispute arises.

In part two of the Squad System, the leader asks each member to select an error they identified in one of the papers. After referring to a composition handbook and reviewing the example(s) in the student papers, each member teaches this skill to the other squad members. The sergeant also records behaviors that exemplify the social skill for that day.

**Publishing**

Publishing is usually the last stage of the writing process. If carefully planned, it makes the preceding stages more purposeful and fulfilling to the students. It defines a goal, or what Fenwick English calls “a celebrative experience.” There are a number of ways to publish final writing products in Group Formats so students work together and not alone. These include class books, newspapers, literary journals, student anthologies, class magazines, tip-sheets, instructional manuals, chain novels, content area dictionaries, reference guides, travel brochures and school handbooks. Such formats are easily structured so the success of the project is based on everyone contributing a paragraph, page, or section.

Research papers are popular ways of “publishing” about literary, media, and language topics. However, students usually confront this task by individually copying passages out of outdated encyclopedias and magazines. The teacher seldom reads the project until it is finished. Sharan’s Group Investigation is a coop-
operative learning method that gives students control of what they will research and how. Students form groups according to common topics identified by the teacher or class. Group members plan the investigation and then divide the work among themselves, each carrying out his or her part of the project to assure individual accountability. Finally, the groups synthesize their information, prepare a final report, and present these findings to the rest of the class. Group Investigation promotes and reinforces social skills as students evaluate their task and group performance during the entire process.

Benefits of Cooperative Writing

Slavin has summarized the extensive body of research supporting the advantages of cooperative learning ("Coop Research" 52-54). Wide consensus exists that cooperative learning has a positive effect on student achievement when the elements of individual accountability and positive interdependence are present. Studies show that there is higher retention, more time on task, and more active participation in cooperative learning groups.

There is even greater agreement about the positive effects on intergroup relations. Cooperative learning improves cross-ethnic and racial relations, promotes students’ respect for each other, and increases the ability of students to work effectively with others. Lastly, cooperative learning assists students in gaining self-esteem, attending class, liking the subject matter, and liking school in general.

Instructional Information

The information-electronic age supplies us with so much data that our task as English teachers has become one of managing and integrating this knowledge, not just professing it. The cooperative writing structures discussed above provide us with instructional alternatives that go beyond information giving and promote mutual understanding and critical thinking within the writing process.

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Works Cited


Portfolio Pedagogy Brings Writing Classrooms to Life

The idea of assessing student writing through portfolios implies such sweeping changes in classrooms that teachers may wonder whether the benefits are worth the effort. In *Portfolios in the Writing Classroom: An Introduction*, a new book from the National Council of Teachers of English, teachers and researchers who have experienced the transition to portfolios tell how it has changed their concepts of assessment and transformed both teaching and student learning. Editor Kathleen Blake Yancey is a former middle school language arts teacher who now teaches English, methods, and assessment courses at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. She sees a "portfolio pedagogy" emerging, varied according to the needs and aims of particular students and programs, attentive to what happens in all phases of the writing process, and encouraging inquiry and reflection by both students and teachers.

In the opening chapter, Catharine Lucas of San Francisco State University discusses the shift in aims of evaluation that portfolio pedagogy creates. External grading of outcomes to rank students against each other is replaced by students' constant reflection and self-evaluation to encourage individual effort. Lucas also notes how the portfolio concept can be distorted through careless imitation, co-option by large-scale testers, and other causes.

The eleven contributors have worked with portfolio projects individually in their classrooms, as team members, administrators, or teacher-collaborators with researchers. They write about using portfolios in middle schools, high schools, and college basic writing classrooms. Among their discoveries are these:

Students develop as writers when the teacher stops grading each piece of writing and substitutes conferences during the writing process, peer-reader reactions, and self-questioning by the writer. This change, the author says, helps more students understand what education is. They quit looking for easy ways to get a good grade and start taking risks and making honest efforts to write.

Students should be coached in the kinds of questions to raise about their own and classmates' writing; for instance, "What did you want your reader to get from this piece?" Such questions, the authors say, can lead to developing personal writing goals, a process that should include spotting strengths on which to build.

The authors report that students develop a sense of responsibility for their writing when they use their portfolios daily to collect new notes, drafts, and finished writing, check on their progress, and analyze which pieces worked best and why. The teacher can use the portfolio in an end-of-term "assessment conference." The student ranks his or her papers from most to least effective and explains why; then the teacher evaluates progress on the basis of the student's top three choices.

The contributors include personal reactions to the risks and challenges of breaking away from the teacher-controlled methods of writing instruction. They offer insights into the support teachers need to do this and comment on the satisfactions of working with student writers. Writes Maryland middle school teacher James E. Newkirk, "I began as a well-meaning but autocratic instructional leader, and ended as a facilitator in a student-driven classroom." An annotated bibliography of resources on portfolios for teaching assessment is included.
Trusting Your Intuitive Sense of Grammar: May the Force Be With You

Thomas J. Buchholz

The Controversy

The debate about teaching grammar, perhaps, will never be resolved. On one hand, a considerable bank of research, dating from the early part of the century and continuing on to today, indicates that teaching grammar has had little or no effect on thinking, speaking, or writing more clearly, precisely, or "correctly." Two comprehensive reports sum up this position very well. Richard Braddock et al. (1963) conclude that teaching formal grammar has a negligible effect on improving writing or even a harmful one because it takes away from actual writing. George Hillocks (1986) concludes that if we want to teach writing effectively, we can't do it by using grammar books and exercises or by presenting rules and advice. Consistently, reports like these, which summarize virtually thousands of research studies, indicate the failure of programmatic grammar instruction to achieve desired results.

On the other hand, tradition and conservatism have always called for formal grammar instruction. In fact, the public at large seems to demand it. Perhaps the reasoning is that grammatical "problems" abound in speech and writing, and that it is the English teacher's function to remediate those "problems." Today, some composition teachers engage in grammar instruction while others don't. Both sides defend their practices with equal veracity. As with many controversies, the reasoning behind arguments of both sides tends to become polarized. Does the issue need to be as polarized as it appears? Can we teach about grammar without having to teach grammar directly?

Curbing Negatives

Surely the most unfortunate aspect of the grammar teaching controversy is the negative focus—the focus on what people can't or don't do. "He can't write a simple sentence." "She doesn't know a noun from a verb." "I've taught that construction time and time again, but they just don't do it right." Whether we do or don't teach grammar units, we've all no doubt at least heard these kinds of statements. Negativism seems to abound when it comes to talking about teaching grammar. Not all the negativism stems from teachers either. Students, who excel at telling vivid accounts of their experiences outside of the classroom, and who display deft ability at finding the right words for language play amongst themselves, often complain that language is a boring subject.

We need a more positive outlook. In reality, everyone knows a good deal about grammar. Obviously some people can't use the labels that linguists use to discuss the language, but that talent merely involves knowing the language of grammar and has nothing to do with using a system of grammar to produce language. Anyone can produce sentences that include highly complex structures, whether or not they can describe what they are doing. As a matter of fact, linguists (Moskowitz, 1985; Fromkin and Rodman, 1988; Aitchison 1985) tell us that five-year-olds are capable of producing most of the syntactic structures included in our language, that they learn them by formulating their own generalizations based on the linguistic input around them, and that correction supplied by adults plays a negligible role in this process of acquisition. Frank Smith (1988), widely respected spokesman on learning theory, also points to the interactive and incidental nature of learning literacy: the interactive and incidental nature of learning literacy. Most of this learning happens before kids begin formal instruction in school.
Linguist Dorothy Sedley (1990), cleverly demonstrates that everyone has considerable knowledge about grammar. She proposes a simple experiment. Take an apparently random sequence of words like the following (actually a scrambled sentence) and make a sentence of them.

noon big Miami the at boat red leaves.

Possible sentences might be:
The big red boat leaves Miami at noon.

At noon, the big red boat leaves Miami.

It's a sure bet that no native speaker would include sequences like:
The red big boat leaves Miami at noon.
The big, red, at noon, boat leaves Miami.

Why not? Because those constructions do not fit in with our internalized system of grammar. Quite simply, they don't feel right. Somewhere along the way in our exposure to English we determined for ourselves, and in our own way of thinking, that certain sequences of words are possible while others are not. We didn't acquire these generalizations because our parents or anyone else taught us rules or because someone corrected our "mistakes." That had very little effect on our acquisition of language. We learned the language we were exposed to almost automatically, because language was so central to our existence, and as small children we were so apt at figuring it out.

It is curious to note that neither the principle about sequencing adjectives in strings of adjectives nor all the options for positioning prepositional phrases are even mentioned for grammar instruction in writing classes. We know instinctively that size comes before color when we have the two adjectives back to back. As language users, we also know when we can drop articles before nouns and when it's possible to delete relative pronouns in complex sentences to create what grammarians refer to as a contact clause. Try explaining that to a foreigner learning English, however. Most people can't explain it. That knowledge is tacit, and again, curiously, those principles aren't found in the most widely used grammar handbooks. Yes, we know a good deal about grammar, but much of what we know wasn't taught to us in any formal sense and isn't even included in the resources we use to study language in school. Perhaps this insight provides us with a positive approach to studying language.

Intuitive Grammar

Some time ago, Constance Weaver (1979) developed the argument that teachers should expand on students' intuitive understanding of grammar rather than teach grammar directly as a system. She referred to intuitive understandings of parts of speech, of functions of modifiers, of agent/action relationships that people have despite their uncertainty about the vocabulary used to discuss these issues. Anyone knows a person can walk quickly, slowly, confidently. But not everyone can identify those words as adverbs. Weaver suggested a focus on what students know and what they can do with their language rather than on what they don't know or can't do, and she suggested talking about grammar in language that students can understand. Unfortunately, much of formal grammar instruction seems to focus on learning terminology (grammatical jargon) useful for labeling.

An equally unfortunate practice occurs when instruction focuses on "correcting" or manipulating someone else's language. Typical grammar workbook exercises ask students to identify or produce verbs or particular types of phrases in sentences probably composed by the textbook editors. The sentences in one textbook were about geography, personal grooming, playtime at school. None of them shared a common context or reflected anything that anyone was likely to say in day to day life. As a result, the exercises seem contrived and decontextualized. Maybe that's another reason students find language study so boring. Such practice appears to do little to build upon their rich, intuitive grasp of the language.

Writing instructors who decide not to teach separate and intensive grammar units are gratified by comments in sources like A Guide to Curriculum Planning in English Language Arts (1986), published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. In making suggestions for internalizing standard usage patterns, the Wisconsin guide clearly recommends avoiding practices like sentence diagramming, labeling parts of speech, underlining mistakes, and memorizing grammatical definitions and rules to apply to writing. Instead, this guide suggests implementing activities that involve learning about language by and while using language, and as much as possible, utilizing the students' own writing in language lessons.
Thus, grammar (considering how to recast sentences, how and where to add elements for clarity and completeness, how to achieve variety in syntax, for example) becomes an integral part of writing, not a separate unit that focuses on labeling and producing, in isolation, anything from adverbial modiﬁers to complex sentence patterns. The approach suggested in the Wisconsin guide not only closely parallels the actual language acquisition process, but it also assumes a good amount of intuitive competence on the part of students as language users.

In the movie “Star Wars,” Luke Skywalker, the hero, is successful because “the Force” is with him. All the influence, power, and intuition for doing the right thing at the right time have been passed on to him by prior generations and become second nature. If he can learn to trust his instincts, he can prevail. In an off-handed sense, our understanding of grammar is like “the Force.”

As language users we have all been saturated with language in our listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing from birth on. Can we even estimate the millions of sentences a typical teenager must have encountered in his/her life? How many has that same person produced? Certainly, a vast amount of linguistic data has been internalized over the years. It’s there, though tacit and dormant. As a result, this basic intuitive sense of grammar, (how to recast sentences in different words, how and where to add words that would indicate color, how many, in what manner, how to compound agents or actions, and more) provides plentiful, though uncharted, waters to explore for teachers hoping to guide their students towards effective linguistic performance. How can we apply this notion of intuitive grammar and engage “the force” in teaching writing?

“May The Force Be With You”

One of the first steps to engaging our students’ intuitive sense of grammar is allowing it to happen, trusting that it will. This probably means putting the handbook on the shelf. Consider it a reference book, like a dictionary. Then start getting students to use language regularly—reading, writing, speaking, listening—in meaningful contexts. The linguistic input we all used to generalize our “rules” about grammar as we first acquired language. Why do things differently in the classroom? Whole Language and Process Approach models provide a sound matrix for getting under way.

To begin, there’s no reason why journal writing can’t start in first grade and span the public school years. Whole Language proponents provide ample evidence of this happening, showing how kids can write wonderful pieces using invented spelling. Through short conference sessions, or by responding to a journal entry, a teacher can ask for details that will result in modiﬁed and even expanded sentences. What kind of? How many? What color? Where was it? When did it happen? Such questions demonstrate authentic interest in ideas as well as language, and kids seem to enjoy answering them. As the students supply these details, they exercise their intuitive ability to produce various sentence structures. There’s no need at this stage to get bogged down in conventional spellings and mechanics. Begin on a positive note, by writing for the sheer enjoyment of it. By becoming familiar with journal writing year after year with gradually increasing levels of sophistication. Imagine what kind of writers might emerge in our high schools if they had kept journals all along, and if those journals, not some prepacked workbook, provided the source for working with language.

The notion of sentence expanding, in itself, is another good way to use kid’s intuitive sense of grammar. Traditionally, programmed materials teach modiﬁcation in a piecemeal fashion. “This is a prepositional phrase, these are its elements, this is how it functions, and this is where it can go in a sentence. Let’s practice it. Next is the inﬁnitive phrase.” The attention, the possibility for confusion, the potential growing dislike for the topic, all emanate from the technique of presenting the material and the resulting jargon. Trusting in an intuitive sense for how language works, why not begin by assuming that expanded sentences with various kinds of modiﬁers can be produced at will? “I like your sentence. Can you add some more information into it? For example, what kind, color, or size is this? How, when, or where was this done? Try to add some of those details to your sentence.” If there’s a syntactic problem, use the ear and the eyes to try to find it, rather than resorting to a handbook exercise. “Is some-
thing missing here? Does it sound like you want it to sound?” When students work in groups, they can share their work, listening and looking together for familiar structures. Dialect differences can be approached as coexisting variations of language, appropriate for different occasions. “What is an effective way to say this in this situation? What about another situation?” With practice, more sophisticated ways to expand sentences can be explored.

William Strong (1986) offers convincing arguments for sentence combining as another strategy that demonstrates what kids can do with language they know. Even though they work at combining structures someone else generated, there appears to be some creativity involved in the process, and there is a common context. There’s always more than one way to combine the elements, so the only one correct answer orientation is eliminated. Strong suggests that by playing with sentence combining, kids are attentive to syntax and internalize how sentences can be constructed. The activity develops their sentence making skills by stimulating or bringing to a level of consciousness their intuitive linguistic competence.

By discussing various solutions to the activity, kids also begin to consider basic and important rhetorical principles that are so often lacking in prepared materials. “What makes this solution different from that one? Do you think there is any difference in meaning?” This is basic rhetoric. Sentence combining is an activity that can carry over into the revising and editing stages of personal writing. Familiarity with the concept seems quite useful. However, there’s a danger that sentence combining can be misused as a way to teach grammar terms.

The Process Approach to teaching writing also allows for building on internalized knowledge. Reading specialists often talk about how important activating prior knowledge is for building comprehension. The same is true for writing. Quite simply, kids write better when they know what they’re writing about. When they don’t have to worry about what to say, they think about how they want to say it. First, exploring prior knowledge in the prewriting stage establishes a base of understanding about the topic. Second, drafting, whether it is interactive or private, produces the structures to work on. Third, revising activates the intuitive data bank of possibilities for expressing ideas. Interactive conferencing, either between teacher and student or among students in small groups, stimulates possibilities for changing and improving what is written. Significantly, the revisions are drawn out of the writer, stimulated by talk about meaning. “I don’t get this. Can you explain it?” The question activates a search for other possible structures to clarify meaning, and the mind begins to generate new sentences. Process oriented activities, for the most part, make little or no use of programmatic materials. The process approach is a matter of thinking, talking, listening, sharing, and not everyone is attending to the same task at the same time. It’s also recursive rather than linear, moving back and forth as the need arises. In short, it’s a model for learning that closely reflects actual language acquisition processes.

As a guiding principle, to make use of kids’ intuitive sense of language, we can have them do more with real language and less with analyzing workbook language. We can have them write and talk to entertain, to explain, to describe, to complain, where the focus is on making meaning for other real people. Whenever possible, we can use genuine contexts. Along the way, the lessons about formats, editing, and communication become real. In addition, we can direct the focus on how language changes when purposes and audiences change. How would they write a letter about cafeteria food to a friend, to the cooks, to their parents? Trust them. They have internalized knowledge about audiences too. It’s “Good-bye Mrs. Porter” to a teacher, but “See ya dude” to a friend, even in second grade. Programmatic materials assume nothing and virtually ignore the vast amount of experience and ability kids have. As Old Ben told Luke Skywalker, “Let the Force be your guide.”

The Controversy Revised

The real issue about teaching grammar need not be as polarized as it appears. Grammar can be learned in more than one way. For over a decade, research in cognitive psychology and psycholinguistics has revealed much about how children acquire language and how learning itself occurs. Rather than enforcing the bits and pieces approach, going a measured step at a time, control-
ling mastery of skills, the research supports innate readiness, holistic learning, natural ability. It's not a matter of forcing know-how into someone's head, but gently pulling experiences and abilities out, however unrefined they may be. Much of what most people know about grammar lies submerged in their minds, more in the form of instinctive ability than as rational awareness. The issue is not about the need to learn grammar. Of course we need to learn grammar. But we do learn it quite naturally. We learn grammar all the time, even when we're not studying it. Given a language rich environment with lots of opportunities to use what we know, our ability with language can only improve. Given a martinet adherence to programmatic materials and learning rules or jargon, it very well could stagnate. The real issue is whether or not we're willing to try. "Use the Force, Luke," Old Ben would say. "Use the Force."

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Works Cited


Dear Mr. Hawthorne: An Author/Letter Activity

Stephen L. Fisher

Many English and language arts teachers are encouraging their students, through response-based literature approaches, to challenge, support, or qualify the themes and messages in what they read. One activity that both my American Literature students and I enjoyed involved writing personal letters to selected authors.

We had read a series of short stories by a variety of writers—in this particular case: Stephen Vincent Benet, Edgar Allan Poe, Ambrose Bierce, and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Through class participation and teacher presentations, we had also discussed themes, styles, and techniques used by the authors or evident in their stories. In addition, I had given them details about the authors' personal backgrounds. I asked the students first to rank the stories in order of personal preference, then to write letters to the authors on the top and bottom of their lists, explaining why they ranked them as they did. They could refer to our class discussion notes on the various elements we had included as part of our study, blending specific references to them with our own individual reactions to what they read. The letters should have an individual reactions to what they read. The letters should have an informal tone. I told them that I didn't need formal, essay-question answers, but I also guided them away
from overly simplified, locker note responses: "Hey, Edgar. Wild story man! See ya after Algebra!"

Several students' letters represent the quality and content of many of the examples I received:

Dear Mr. Benet:
I must say I really did enjoy your story "By the Waters of Babylon." It may have been my interest in what may happen in the future, but it could be something more than that. The sheer wonder that the main character showed toward the city he found really excited me. It also struck me how this character had overcome his amazement and started to wonder who these gods may have been. When he found the gods to be simple men, I admired the way in which he had the courage to bring his people back to New York, but I admired the father's warning even more.

Dear Mr. Poe:
I have recently read your story entitled "The Cask of Amontillado" and I found it quite enjoyable. You are excellent in creating suspense for your reader. Throughout the story there was foreshadowing, yet the ending was still surprising. You used interesting description, yet not too complex to the point where the reader's attention is lost. The fact that the carnival was going on seemed ironic, which added to the story. I like the fact that the victim was dressed as a clown—nice idea! Thank you for writing such a suspenseful, bone-chilling story, and keep up the good work!

Dear Edgar:
I am writing to you about your short story "The Cask of Amontillado." I found it very confusing. The unusual vocabulary words used in the story were enough to confuse anyone besides, of course, the creator of Webster's dictionary himself. Also, for someone who is famed for horror stories, this was very dull and not scary at all. Although I will admit the ending was dramatic, but not scary!

Thank you for listening to my opinion and good luck with future writings.

Dear Mr. Hawthorne:
After reading your short story "Young Goodman Brown," I felt I needed to tell you some of the problems I had with this work. While I realize you intended to use the device of "either/or" choice in your story, I found it hard to follow and my attention was easily lost. The idea of using a dream or reality was a good one, but I felt the way you used it added confusion. Also, I was often confused as to which character was speaking. This made it difficult to build up characters in my mind. If you could have explained this more clearly, the whole plot may have been clearer to me. If you take these few suggestions, I'm sure your next work might just be an award-winning piece of literature.

Dear Mr. Hawthorne:
I thought that "Young Goodman Brown" was a very well-written story. It made me think and it had a message. I would say that the only thing you could have done to make it better would be to use simpler and clearer words. You are a good writer and I hope to see more of your work in the future.

As I read their letters, I was impressed by the honesty, insight and comprehension. Most were specific and complimentary to their "winners" and, I was happy to see, gracious, questioning, and often even helpful toward their "losers." At the completion of the activity, we discussed the results (I had done the activity with them and shared my rankings and reasons as part of the discussion). We talked about trends—the tendency for more (but not all!) students to rank Hawthorne near the bottom, as opposed to their teacher's top ranking of the good Mr. Hawthorne, for example. The students spoke negatively about difficult vocabulary or dislike of ambiguity just as easily as they did positively about effective suspense or interest in science fiction and, as one student said, "just
plain being scared.” They demonstrated confidence in their own responses and tolerance to different views.

The author/letter activity can easily be expanded to include more of different stories and authors, and it can be modified for different kinds of letters aimed at other audiences or purposes. I believe that students can more easily connect to literature when they are more directly involved in it, as this activity allows. I believe that they can better see and accept the relevance of good literature when they feel free and comfortable enough to disagree with an author’s approach or message, as their letters often demonstrated. I was pleased with this activity because it gave them that freedom, allowed them to use their own developing writers’ voices, provided a specific audience for their reactions, and helped them clarify and even modify their personal responses to what they had read. The students like it because, as many of them said, “It’s easier to think of lots of things to say. It’s not like a test.”

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Book Reviews


“Mariette in Ecstasy” begins in the heat of August with narration by nature, plain chant, and meditation. “Half-moon and a wrack of gray clouds. . . . Matins. Lauds. And then silence. Wind and nighthawk teetering on it and yawning away into the woods.”

Ron Hansen’s unique novel is a mystery with tensions, both spiritual and sentient. Virtue and sin, protagonist and villain work, sing, and pray in a cloistered community of nuns. How long can such contrary forces cohabitate? Shouldn’t life in a convent be simpler, especially in 1906? Shortly after seventeen-year-old Mariette Baptiste enters the convent of Our Lady of Sorrows, she tells Sister Hermance of her desire to be a great saint. . . . A few weeks later she confides to the convent confessor, Fr. Henri Marriott, the desire to share in the “. . . hurt and torment of Jesus on the cross.” But she does not reveal new and increasing pains in her hands, feet, and left side.

Could one so young be spiritually gifted? Probably not, but the old priest suggests that she begin to keep a journal and send it to him confidentially. Mariette obeys, but privacy is compromised when Mother Saint-Raphael, mistress of novices, intercepts and covertly reads the entries.

Has Satan entered the contemplative community? Could Mariette be his accomplice? The reader cannot be certain after the gathering of Mariette and other novices in a “secret place” to perform a playlet depicting spiritual yearnings in the “Song of Songs.”

Definitions of virtue and spirituality are at stake. Potentials for channeling sexual energy into delusions of spiritual rapture or astonishing physical manifestations is the novel’s central mystery. The gathering ecstasy and torment reach a flashpoint in the quiet hours of Christmas morning when, for the first time, “Blood scribbles down [Mariette’s] wrists and ankles and scrawls like red handwriting on the floor.”
Has Mariette, with her chocolate eyes and thrash of luxuriant brown hair, become imprinted with the stigmata? If so, she is in the company of Francis of Assisi and Catherine of Siena. But skepticism must have its proper place in such unusual events. Throughout history, the Catholic Church has practiced great discretion in response to those who manifest the physical injuries of Christ’s crucifixion.

As Mariette’s wounds recurrently bleed through the winter and spring, the secret is learned by others in and beyond the convent. Mother Saint-Raphael subjects Mariette to mental and physical harassments as she searches for explanations other than personal sanctity, while Father Marriott petitions for guidance from the regional magisterium. Mariette’s father, a doctor of virtue and reputation, who reluctantly presented his beloved daughter to the convent, is called in to examine the wounds and render judgment as to their divine, hysterical, or fraudulent source. His decision may astonish the reader in that it is so direct and seemingly free from doubt or conflict.

Reading “Mariette in Ecstasy” will be absorbing and nostalgic for Catholics who may recall that prie-dieux, the Tantum Ergo, memoraries, Gregorian Chant, contritions, penances, sacrileges, the noon Angelus, and other parochial realities once indelibly stamped so many. But this novel transcends nostalgia; it is a unique tale of mystery and suspense cradled in nearly perfect prose narration.

Though the novel is brief, Mariette, as a complex and tormented character, may even approach the stature of fiction peers in the novels of Graham Green. For readers, any comforts of final certainty and insight related to Mariette’s wounds, remains elusive. And that is my final compliment. How appropriate that a novel about such mysteries pertaining to God and human souls remain unresolved, no matter how fervently we might wish otherwise.

reviewed by Jerald Hauser


Cutting Stone is a fiction argosy of grace and power that mature readers should embrace and cherish for years.

Plot and characters are modern tragedy prototypes. A marriage in jeopardy is the dominant source of story suspense as Eleanor and Laurel Poindexter move from socially lustrous Baltimore to the desolate town of Bowie, Arizona. Laurel begins to nurture a banking business and recover from his lung disease, while the once thriving Eleanor commences a descending life spiral into depression and social isolation. She seeks solace in the design of a magnificent hacienda, then in an affair with ranch owner, Frank Wheeler.

What results is classical tragedy. Someone must pay for the sins of weak mortals. Crushed by guilt, Frank and Eleanor stagger through the story in search of redemption. Who will forgive them? Laurel, who deduces Eleanor’s grief as alcoholism, or Frank’s wife, Mary Doreen, who suspects infidelity, yet represses it?

Burroway’s novel is more than a tale of connubial anguish. Always in the background is Mexican revolutionary, Pancho Villa, whose insurrection provides a large canvas for various unique adventures.

Lloyd Wheeler, captured by Villa along with prospecting partner, Sam Hum, is sent to New Orleans to purchase a new Hudson for the Mexican leader. Lloyd’s humorous and suspenseful Odyssey forges his male identity in a cause larger than personal ego.

But for Sam Hum, a Chinese boy of nineteen, originally captured by Lloyd, the experience costs him an ear, sliced off by one of Villa’s soldiers. Hum escapes and commences a long search for Lloyd, whom he doesn’t know has willingly joined Villa forces as scout and errand boy. Eventually Sam and Eleanor will confront each other in a mystical desert episode.

Burroway moves Eleanor and Laurel Poindexter, Frank and Mary Wheeler, Lloyd Wheeler, Sam Hum, Pancho Villa,
and others into a final Bowie scenario that features the feeding of Villa’s army, Hum’s attempt to assassinate Villa, and Eleanor’s reentry into social acceptance.

Burroway’s prose descriptions are sensitive for the way they help readers inspect intimate states of her characters. We are stunned through the vision of Eleanor as she witnesses the death of young Jesse Wheeler at the moment she and Frank are sexually coupled. And after turning many pages in pursuit of how Lloyd will ever transport a Hudson from New Orleans to Mexico, we share Lloyd’s astonished delight as he learns the true secret of a deep river that tips he and the Hudson from a makeshift raft into its churning depths.

The title, Cutting Stone, refers to a marble quarry a few miles from Bowie that no one can afford to mine. But this novel is another kind of quarry with a lode of frail but hopeful human characters and mining chisels sharpened by the prose and narrative power of a very talented author. Go West with this one as far as you can.

— reviewed by Jerald Hauser


Formatted like a picture book and wordless, this exciting group of photographs is in a meaningful sense ageless. Close ups and distance shots, looking up and down, the photos surprise and invite attention to design, to color relationships, and to detail. There are the two dozen black ants grouped like a halo on and around an apple core laying on a corner of pink concrete; the segment of a circular grate with several patches of weeds peeping through; and the ribbed-umbrella pattern of the big tent backgrounding a trio of trapeze artists. The wonder of sharp observation is evident in the photographs. And how wonderfully sharpened might observations become with the “reading” of this book with children and adolescents.

— reviewed by Nicholas J. Karolides


Each of these books reveals nature asleep through the power of expressive illustrations and the suggestion of very few words. Ginsburg uses a simple question and a simpler answer between, we learn at the end, a mother and an awake child: “Are the wolves asleep? Asleep. And the bees? Asleep.” Calhoun also uses this format, the questions varying from “Where does the squirrel sleep, Papa?” to “Does a boat sleep at night Mama?”

Tafuri’s illustrations are exquisite, whether of a fox curled into a ball, its nose tucked into its tail, or of bumblebees nestled among the petals of iridescent blossoms. The quality of night is expressed in muted though glowing water colors. The animals in their sleep are quite alive.

Ed Young’s illustrations are vibrant with movement and luminous colors evoking the creatures and objects as in a dream of daytime memory. An inset of contrasting dark colors shows each of them asleep in their appropriate places and attitudes. The final pages of the daytime and setting sun followed by the moon are especially glorious.

— reviewed by Nicholas J. Karolides


Larry Callen’s book Contrary Imaginations portrays divisions within a family occurring after the death of their estranged father. Together the family members problem-solve their way past a delicate and frightening situation. Through Alex, the reader explores how a family deals with death and compliance with their father’s last wishes. Alex’s father has chosen to be cremated
without consulting anyone, and when the family arrives at Grandma Victoria's house they are greeted with the unexpected news of his death as well as a cardboard box filled with his remains.

Alex's introspection reveals how he feels about life and death with the help of a character, Constantin, a greek philosopher, in a book he is reading. Callen uses this book-within-a-book device to present philosophical options to Alex as well as his readers. At times, this method can be confusing, but overall it adds to what Callen is trying to say.

Contrary Imaginations looks at how differently people approach problem solving as well as morality; it does this through the various ways the family members suggest that their father be buried. Struggling with their personal reactions to death and cremation, they overcome their fear in order to honor their father's last wishes.

Callen writes well about a sensitive subject, demonstrating, through characterization, his knowledge of human nature. His lighthearted use of humor puts a difficult subject into acceptable terms, and readers, along with Alex, begin to examine their own feeling on this subject. His message and the warmly appropriate way he conveys it surmounts any confusion created by his book-within-a-book method.

reviewed by Berta Zimdars


The Summer of Sassy Jo explores the topic of communication. Taking one family's hardships, it illustrates how life can interfere with personal reality. J.P. Reading's story focuses on a young girl, Sara Jo, and her anger. It reflects a familiar modern reality shared by children confused by the disintegration or redefinition of family. The story does not censor Sara's adolescence or her anger, allowing her full range of to explore her feelings and situation.

After an alcoholic mother abandons her to a rigid father and repressed aunt, Sara experiences lonely, painful years—even more empty after her father dies—struggling with her sense of loss. Then, her mother returns to become her advocate and teacher; she provides Sara with opportunity. This is not the typical happy ending; rather, it becomes a difficult beginning. The author vividly conveys the effects that abandonment and dysfunctional relationships have on a child's ability to mature. Through Sara's reunion with her mother, we witness the effort needed to reestablish family and trust.

J. P. Reading writes a forthright account of Sara's feelings. Frank language expresses Sara's inner dialogue, with the author focusing on characterization to convey her message. Strength and weakness are concepts central to this book as well as traits shared equally by the women and men.

reviewed by Berta Zimdars


When our daughters were young, one of their favorite books was Charlotte Zolotow's The Sky Was Blue (Harper & Row 1963). Ms. Zolotow's latest book expresses the theme of continuity and love. A little girl admires pictures of significant stages of her mother's life, from the mother's birth to the little girl's beginning.

This generation's children will respond to this book (as ours did yesteryear) for its theme. It suggests the natural pattern of growth in life and the stability of family. Love and warmth, too, emerge from the illustrations. Anita Lobel's art work is masterful in the engaging use of soft colors (subdued for the present day scenes and bright for the photos of the past) and in the realistic details that provide setting and background not expressed in the words.

reviewed by Nicholas J. Karolides
District #1
Patricia Santilli, Glen Hills Middle School, Glendale, WI 53209
Sandra Zinot, Waukesha Public Schools, Waukesha, WI 53186

District #2
Diane Mertens, Edgewood High School, Madison, WI 53711
David Schnurfsma, UW-Madison, Madison, WI 53705

District #3
Mari Sue Bethke, Boscobel H.S., Boscobel, WI 53805
Al Menninga, UW-Platteville, Platteville, WI 53818

District #4
Richard Gappa, UW-La Crosse, La Crosse, WI 54601
Dorothy Gronning, Viroqua Area Schools, Viroqua, WI 54665

District #5
Maureen Giblin, 904 7th St., Stevens Point, WI 54481

District #6
Jean Stebbins-Mueller, Clovis Grove School, Menasha, WI 54952
Frankie Mengeling, Lourdes Academy, Oshkosh, WI 54901

District #7
Bonnie Frochette, West De Pere High School, De Pere, WI 54115
Mary Kirchman, West De Pere High School, De Pere, WI 54115

District #8
Janice DesJardin, Catholic Central H.S., Marinette, WI 54143
Antia Hartman, Bemidji High School, Bemidji, WI 54209

District #9
Greg Venna, Wausau Public Schools, Wausau, WI 54401
Pauline Babler, D.C. Everest Sr. High, Schofield, WI 54476

District #10
Carla Traun, Altoona High School, Altoona, WI 54720
Barbara Ruy, Chippewa Falls Senior High, Chippewa Falls, WI 54729

District #11
Margaret Sailor, Chetek High School, Chetek, WI 54728

District #12
Kimberly Towns, East Junior High, Superior, WI 54880
Gary Banker, East Junior High, Superior, WI 54880

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