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Note From the Editor

With winter coming on all too soon, and with several weeks of the school year under our belts, we are pleased to imagine your delight at receiving another issue of the Wisconsin English Journal. This first issue of the year is always one in which we publish awards that were given last Spring. It is our opportunity to recognize again colleagues among us who have achieved public respect, colleagues who work hard in our profession and who inspire us with their dedication and talent. Congratulations!

We do not have to remind any of our readers that times are hard, both for our students and for us as educators. Teaching and guiding students who are facing an array of challenges, some beyond what many of us had to face, demand our full attention, intelligence, analysis, and determination. What do our students need? What do we need? How do we assess what is working and what is not? How do we use the technology at our fingertips to our best advantage? How do we enable our students and ourselves to address what needs attention; how do we advocate for students whose voices are not otherwise heard? What helps us? And what hinders us?

We invite your thoughts on these matters. We invite you to share with all of us what you have been working on in or out of the classroom. We invite your creative expression. Such demanding times as these can only be made better by communication—the very thing we urge our students to do day in and day out. Let us hear from you.

— Mary Ellen Alea

Request for Submissions

The Wisconsin English Journal invites you to submit your work for publication. We are interested in articles, stories, and poems.

We prefer submissions on a 3.5" disk, preferably using MS Word; however, we will also accept either work done with Windows or hard copy. We request also that documented articles employ MLA style.

Upcoming deadlines:

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Dr. Mary Meiser wins 1995 Chisholm Award

There are many words that we can use to describe the recipient of the 1995 Chisholm Award — intense, efficient, intelligent, reliable, committed, scholarly.

All of us envy her educational background and applaud her professional and scholarly contributions. In the university where she teaches, she has pioneered courses and programs that have helped students be better teachers and guardians of language acquisition and writing. She has served on countless committees, but her role is not that of a bystander on these committees because she has not been afraid to walk on hallowed ground. By taking stands on issues that others would prefer to ignore, she has increased the expectations and opportunities for language learning.

The 1995 Chisholm Award recipient Dr. Mary Meiser is a leader in the best sense of the word. She has been a special spokesperson for those who haven’t had equal opportunities and, in particular, she has championed women and our Hmong population in the state. One of her most innovative projects has been a video script and handbook to accompany a WCCTE Media Committee video designed to help secondary English teachers work with Hmong students.

Mary has long been active in the Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English. Those of us in the CESA 10 district remember her whimsical graphics on newsletters she sent as district director. We also remember the shoebox of money she kept for activities in our district. Mary moved away from the concept of shoebox money quickly. She began working to organize and carry out professional development activities through WCCTE, activities that brought good income for the State Council but, more importantly, gave teachers across the state better opportunities for staff development in the language arts. She chaired a memorable convention and served as president in a year when major decisions had to be made. She continues to serve WCCTE in many ways, always demonstrating how much she cares about WCCTE being a strong connection and resource for teachers.

Because of her major contributions to the Wisconsin English Language Arts, Mary is widely recognized as an authority on English and language arts issues in the state. She made major contributions to the *Guide to Curriculum Planning in English Language Arts*, a guide which has served us all well as we work to improve our curriculum and instruction. She has consulted or presented in countless districts in Wisconsin and nationally.

Her publications, including her recent book *Good Writing*, address educational needs and provide guidance for teachers and administrators. Her recent article, “The Feel Good Curriculum,” in the *Wisconsin English Journal*, is just another example of Mary’s quest for high expectations for all students. But it is important to add that she never expects more of others than she expects of herself. As one colleague stated, “Without question, Mary ranks as one of Wisconsin’s most active scholars in English/language arts.”

Those of us who know Mary know that she is not one for small talk or wasting time. If she invites you to lunch, you can be sure there is an agenda; and her plan is to gather information before making a move. If money is an issue for a project, Mary writes grants as if they were grocery lists. If she can’t sleep, she has been known to grade papers in the bathroom of hotels in the middle of the night so that she doesn’t disturb a roommate with the lights.

Forever in blue jeans, Mary is sometimes considered to be a renegade; but she’s a renegade in the best sense caring for students, teachers, friends, and family. Her preliminary work in preparing colleagues for England, her love for serious discussions over a glass of wine, her support for all of us who have needed a helping hand along the way, and her pride in her family are testimony to Mary’s true self.

Martin Luther wrote, “The heart of the giver makes the gift dear and precious.” Mary Meiser has given much to us all. Thank you, Mary.
I have been teaching for fifteen years. In those years my students and I have embarked on many projects and experiments; however, the one recently completed by two tenth grade English/Speech classes is, hands down, the winner in the overall amazing success category. There were two parts to the project: an exploration and involvement with Edgar Lee Masters Spoon River Anthology and the research and creation of our own Fox River Anthology. The latter was an exploration into the lives, accomplishments, and legacies of those who settled the area of northeastern Wisconsin in which we live.

Most teachers recognize that some of the best ideas in the classroom are born of a sudden flight of fancy on the part of a teacher or student. In this case, it was a student who commented that our particular valley, in terms of diversity of occupations and contributions of those who settled our area, is similar to Master’s quasi-fictional Illinois valley. This casual remark was the catalyst for the following mammoth undertaking on the part of the students.

Part one: The Spoon River Anthology

Purpose:
1) To appreciate, discuss, evaluate the literary contribution of Edgar Lee Masters.
2) To memorize and present a Masters’ monologue as part of a semester exam.
3) To create and present an original script based on non-memorized monologues.

Procedure:
1) Following a discussion/definition of soliloquy and monologue, students were given copies of Edgar Lee Masters’ Spoon River Anthology. We read and discussed the preface; noted characters who are not fictional and important to Master’s life.
2) Students were told to select a monologue to be memorized and presented to the class. In order to assure that fifty-four different monologues would be chosen, they were told to skim all 244 found in The Spoon River anthology and to create a “wish” list of possible choices to memorize. After they had done so, through a lottery process, monologues were chosen and assigned to be memorized.
3) A date was set for presentation. In addition to the memorization of Masters’ lines, the assignment required an analytical essay or character analysis.
4) The monologues were presented and videotaped. Costumes and props were optional, but many chose to use them. With few hitches, this part of the assignment was very well done.
5) To provide an additional glimpse of the Masters’ characters not presented to the class through the taping process, classes were divided into small groups, assigned the monologues not previously heard, and told to create an environment and corresponding script that would reveal the lives, as chronicled by Masters, of the rest of the inhabitants of Spoon River.
6) After one week of collaboration and scripting, original scenarios were presented to the class. Among the scripts presented were an Oprah Winfrey interview, a gravedigger’s conversation pondering the merits and demerits of those “sleep-
ing on the hill,” St. Peter deciding who had earned the right to enter the pearly gates, a *Jeopardy* game, etc. All were clever, creative, and entirely original.

If we had stopped at this point, I would not be typing this submission. It was at this time that we wondered about our own valley and a wonderful unit was born.

**Part Two: The Fox River Anthology**

**Purpose:**

1) To do original research into the lives of early settlers of the Fox River valley.
2) To compile a research paper based on the findings.
3) To create an original monologue based on the research paper.
4) To write and deliver an informative speech based on the paper.
5) To replicate the research papers with copies given to The Lawrence University Archives, The Outagamie Historical Society, and The Appleton Area School District Archives.
6) To video-tape selected original monologues to be used in social study units in elementary schools in the valley.

**Procedure:**

1) With the assistance of one of our media specialists and the archivist at Lawrence University, we compiled a list of settlers who are recognized as having made historical marks on the Fox River Valley.
2) Students were given the lists of settlers. The Lawrence archivist, as well as the media specialist, devoted two class periods to providing background for the individuals listed. They helped students select their subject for research. The Lawrence archivist was important to this project as the city of Appleton is really a by-product of the university. Many of our early citizens were directly or indirectly tied to the school. The archivist later volunteered many hours to work with students as they searched the Lawrence archives for information needed to complete their research.
3) Information was given to each student listing possible sources of information: The Lawrence Archives, The Wisconsin Collection at the Public Library, The Genealogical Society, The Outagamie Historical Society and Museum. (As research progressed, students discovered that sources such as cemetery registries, court records, church rosters, and city directories provided unexpected and useful information).
4) Following the dissemination of “how to” and “where to” information, students were assigned a research paper, using the MLA format, due in four weeks time. The required length of text was four to six pages. (Most students exceeded the requirement.) In addition to the report, they were to include any charts, maps, photos, photocopies, maps, etc., encountered, which would add dimension to the paper.

5) During the time allotted for research and acquiring material, a portion of each class period was spent networking: Students reported on progress, supplied information they had run across concerning other student’s subjects, asked questions, and shared new leads. The networking was amazing, and everyone was caught up in the action. As few pertinent research materials were available in the school’s media center, all research was done outside of school. Amazingly, students willingly traveled the length and breadth of the county to garner facts and information. During the final three days before the projects were due, students were allowed to work in class on rough drafts and assembling the final product. MLA format, the works-cited page, maps, photos, etc. were checked; problems and questions resolved.
6) The papers and a previously distributed evaluation rubric were submitted on the due date.

**Phase Two of Part Two:**

1) Using the notes gathered for the writing of the rough and final drafts, students presented informative speeches to the class based on the subject they had researched.
2) Again, using the notes, students wrote original monologues. They followed the format used by Masters as he created posthumous autobiographies for the residents of Spoon River. The classes read all of the fifty-four monologues and selected ten from each class to be video-taped. Volunteers from the two classes memorized the chosen monologues which were taped in our TV studio.

*continued on p. 40*
Using a Reading Strategy to Facilitate Writing

Eileen Schwalbach
Milwaukee Trade and Technical High School

English teachers have generally taken it for granted that reading literature and writing about it are tasks that should go together. However, although the connection between reading and writing is widely endorsed by practitioners as well as theorists, it is not well understood. One interpretation of this connection has resulted in the suggestion that students should write in response to literature, chronicling their life experiences and beliefs that are similar to those presented in a certain text. For example, the teacher's edition of Literature and Language suggests that students can explore their knowledge of gangs, the problems of child care, and the background of the migration of blacks to the North in the 1920s when reading Richard Wright's "The Rights to the Streets of Memphis." Is the connection then merely that literature provides topics about which students write, in the way that they sometimes write after taking a field trip? If this is the only connection, is the piece of literature necessary at all for students to write about personal, sociological, or historical topics? Students can write about any life experiences without the necessity of a text. Reading response theorists as well as learning researchers have stressed the importance of background knowledge in reading and learning, and writing can be used to access or develop this knowledge. But isn't there another connection between reading and writing, one in which the reading informs the writing and the writing clarifies the interpretation of the text, one in which the student is engaged in the text, using text structures to constrain the reading?

Louise Rosenblatt advocates this kind of reading in which there is a transaction between the reader and the text. Although the reader's response is primary in this process, the text plays a crucial role 1) to activate elements in the reader's past experiences, 2) to guide the selecting, rejecting, and ordering of meaning, and 3) to regulate what is held in the forefront of the reader's attention. Rosenblatt also recognizes the importance of genre conventions in the reading process. She states, "Each genre, each kind of work, e.g., a sonnet or an ode, a detective novel, a picaresque novel, a psychological novel makes its own kinds of convention demands on the reader" (57). She continues, "Traditional subjects, themes, treatments, may provide the guides to organization and the background against which to recognize something new or original in the text" (57).

In this article I have explored a way of connecting reading and writing that uses students' background knowledge but takes them beyond this knowledge to knowledge of text and text structures. Students at an urban Midwestern high school were taught an interpretive strategy to help them construct meaning in metaphorical expressions, ranging from slang to poetry. This kind of instruction is consistent with the recommendation in the Center for the Learning and Teaching of Literature's report, Literature Instruction in American Schools to "develop programs that emphasize students' ability to develop and defend their interpretations of literary selections" (120).

The importance of students being able to develop and defend interpretations has been a concern for educators for many years. I. A. Richards in his seminal work on reader response to poetry found that many of his students, undergraduate English majors at Cambridge working on Honours Degrees, had trouble understanding the "plain sense" (13), "sensuous apprehension" (14), and imagery of the poems. They were misled by irrelevant past experiences, stock responses, sentimentality, doctrinal beliefs, and technical presuppositions about poetry (15). Squire found that adolescents responding to short stories had problems understanding details and misused their own experiences and critical theory to interpret the texts. More re-
cently, Smith has stated that “readers who adopt what we have called an association-driven orientation to reading enhance neither their response to literature nor their understanding of their lives” (215) because they are distracted from the text by these associations with their own lives.

The following discussion is one illustration of how students learned to interpret a text structure, in this case metaphor, and how this ability facilitated their understanding of the text and helped them generate ideas for writing about their interpretations. Students were not misled by their prior knowledge but were able to use this knowledge to construct meanings consistent with the texts.

Before I began teaching the unit to a sophomore English class, I wanted to assess the students’ understanding of how metaphors create meaning. I asked them to comment in writing on Eve Merriam’s “Metaphor,” expecting them to have little difficulty in writing a paragraph about the poem.

Morning is
a new sheet of paper
for you to write on.

Whatever you want to say,
all day,
until night
folds it up
and files it away.

The bright words and the dark words
are gone
until dawn
and a new day
to write on.

I found, however, that many students were not able to say anything about the central metaphor of the poem—that morning is a new sheet of paper, that night folds up the paper and files it away, and that one can begin the next morning to write bright and dark words again.

Doug wrote,

*It means that everyday is different and new while you are making new memories.*

Margarita wrote,

*I think the poem means that you should live your life to the fullest every day. Don’t waste time, and say whatever you want to say. Express yourself.*

Reading these brief paragraphs, I felt that they weren’t merely unusual or idiosyncratic responses to the poem. Instead they were the responses of students who didn’t know how to construct interpretations of the poem. David’s essay suggested this strongly:

*It’s about life or every day habbits[sic]. About people and every habbits. It’s about they way we are in the morning in the afternoon and at night. Really I don’t have any idea.*

But were these students puzzled only by not knowing how to make meaning, or were they also baffled about how to express this meaning in a written comment? With this question in mind, I constructed a unit in which students would learn a strategy for understanding metaphor and practice writing about metaphors in poetry.

I began this study of metaphor by examining how our everyday language is filled with figurative language. (Cartoons, advertising, and slang expressions are filled with metaphors that help to create meaning.) Then I presented a four-step strategy, adapted from the analysis of metaphor by Lakoff and Turner, for constructing interpretations of these metaphors:

1) Determine that a metaphor exists by recognizing that the stated text is absurd at the literal level,
2) Determine what is being compared to what,
3) Brainstorm to find the various associations of the second term,
4) Decide which associations fit the first term of the metaphor.

I modeled the use of this strategy with slang expressions. Students supplied examples of slang expressions, decided which ones were metaphorical, determined what was being compared to what (e.g., relaxing is like “chilling”), brainstormed for associations for the second term (e.g., “chilling”), and then decided which associations were appropriate for the first term (e.g., relaxing). Then the students practiced using the strategy in small groups, applying it to cartoons and advertisements.

Next the class used the strategy to interpret
the metaphors in Langston Hughes’s “Dreams.”

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Students at an urban Midwestern high school were taught an interpretive strategy to help them construct meaning in metaphorical expressions, ranging from slang to poetry.

After students identified the two central metaphors, they decided that life without dreams would be a broken-winged bird because both are “helpless,” “near death,” “hurt,” “disabled,” “unable,” “easy prey,” “vulnerable,” “sad,” “scared,” “defensive,” and “defenseless.” These responses resulted from the brainstorming about “broken-winged bird” and the elimination of any associations that did not fit the first term of the metaphor, “Life without dreams.” The students went through the same process for the second central metaphor in the text, “Life is a barren field frozen with snow.” Then, armed with these two sets of associations, the class, working together, wrote the following essay.

Metaphors in “Dreams”
In “Dreams” Langston Hughes uses two metaphors to show that life without dreams is lonely, hopeless, and empty. In the first stanza he compares life without dreams to a broken-winged bird. Both the person and the bird would feel hurt and helpless. The bird would be easy prey for other animals. Likewise, the person would be defenseless against people who want to take advantage of him or her. The bird and the person would also feel frustrated and scared because they couldn’t do anything about their condition.

In the second stanza Hughes compares life without dreams to a barren field covered with snow. The field and the person are isolated and lifeless. The field is without either plant or human life; similarly, the person feels he or she has nothing to live for. The person also feels empty because he or she doesn’t serve a purpose. Hughes captures the hopelessness of people who have no goals or ambitions in their lives.

The students were learning to use the strategy to think about metaphors and to use their thoughts in writing about the poems.

We continued to practice using the strategy with different texts. In small groups, for example, students wrote collaborative essays, analyzing the extended metaphor in another Hughes poem, “Mother to Son.” Finally they wrote an essay examining how Robert Burns and William Wordsworth use metaphors to describe the women in “My Love Is Like a Red, Red Rose” and “She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways.”

When I finished the two-week unit, I again gave students the poem “Metaphor” and asked them again to write a paragraph about its meaning. Here is Doug’s second attempt:

The poem “Morning is like a new sheet of paper” compares morning and a new sheet of paper. When the author tells this poem he tells that morning is like the beginning of a the [sic] day just like a new sheet of paper is just before your writing. He also mentions that night is like a filing cabinet filing away the day. Everything that compares to a new sheet of paper and morning is that they are both bright, clear and they both stand out.

Here Doug refers directly to two aspects of the metaphor: morning as a new sheet of paper and night as a filing cabinet. In his first essay he does not refer to the metaphor but instead makes a vague statement about every day being “different and new.” While the new paragraph has rhe-
torical and grammatical problems, it shows improvement in Doug’s ability to think about metaphor and to use his thoughts in understanding the poem.

Margarita’s second reading of the poem is also more attentive to the text than her first attempt had been:

“In the poem a day is being compared to a sheet of paper. A sheet of paper can be similar to a day because they can both be plain, white, full of words, and at times even dull. As you fold up a piece of paper you can also fold up your day at night.”

Margarita’s first essay does not refer to any of these three points. Instead it focuses on one line (“Whatever you want to say”), without regard for the line’s context. Merriam’s stanza goes on to say that at night you put away “whatever you want to say.” In her second essay Margarita does not take lines out of context. Instead she explains the metaphor that is central to the poem.

And finally David’s essay:

“Morning is a new sheet of paper. It means that every morning is like a new start. Your morning can be a wonderful, exciting morning or a cold, dark, boring morning. Those good bright warm mornings is the time you get a good start. Because some mornings can get blurry and wrinkled and that’s when you get off of the wrong foot.”

David’s improvement is especially gratifying because he has been diagnosed as learning disabled and finds writing very difficult. After we had finished the unit, he told his Regular Education Initiative (REI) teacher that he finally understood metaphors because of the strategy we practiced in class.

How can one explain the improvement exemplified in the work of Doug, Margarita, and David?

As any writing teacher knows, the quality of the final draft depends upon the ideas students can generate in early phases of their work. The metaphor strategy gave these students a way to generate ideas by constructing interpretations of metaphors. They came into the unit knowing that metaphors compare unlike things, but in learning to use the strategy, they also gained “knowing how” knowledge. They learned how to read metaphors, and learning to do that enhanced their writing.

In learning to read metaphors, students found a new way to bring their own background knowledge and experience to the text. Rosenblatt describes reading as a transaction between the reader and the text. In using step 3 of the metaphor strategy, students brought their knowledge of broken winged birds, old wooden staircases, roses, and violets to their reading of the poems. However, they also learned how to let the text inform their use of this knowledge. While using step 4 of the strategy, they decided which associations for the second term of the metaphor fit the first term, while considering the context of the metaphor in the poem.

Doug, Margarita, David, and the other students became more competent readers and writers because they learned how to construct meaning in their reading of metaphors. The strategies that helped them read poetry also helped them find things to say about it.

Works Cited


Conference-Intensive Teaching: A Model for Freshman English

James M. Hunter
Edgewood College

As teachers of freshman English, most of us are great believers in the value of the individual student conference. A couple of times a semester—or three or four times if we are especially dedicated and have especially forgiving spouses and families—we announce conference times, produce neatly typed sheets of dates and hours, and require every student to sign up for a session to meet with us and go over drafts or finished copies of papers. Perhaps we cancel a class meeting that week to compensate; or perhaps we don’t. And then we plow our way through eight-hour days of meeting with students, emerging a little glassy-eyed perhaps, but with a little glow of inner satisfaction that for at least twenty minutes or so we’ve managed to give each student some of that individualized attention and one-on-one criticism we think is so crucial to learning how to write.

When we’re finished...but of course we haven’t really finished; instead, we go home to catch up on all the other work—grading quizzes, writing comments on papers, preparing the next day’s classes—which has been waiting in the wings all the time we were doing the “extra” work of meeting with students. And maybe we wonder a little whether it’s really worth all the effort, and try to gauge the effect we’re having on our students’ dedication, the quality of their work, their willingness to learn and their love of writing. But we don’t wonder too much or too long; we keep the faith and do it again, semester after semester.

At least, that was the traditional scenario as I had experienced it through most of seventeen years of college teaching. Over the past few years, however, I had begun to experiment a little with the way I use conferencing, and so had several of my colleagues at Edgewood College. This spring, three of us decided to pool our efforts and experiment collaboratively. Our aim was to see whether we could make our use of student conferences more effective and more extensive, and do it without taxing our sanity, our energy, or both. We also wanted to know a little more definitely just how worthwhile our efforts were; we wanted to be able to measure some of the effects of a conference-intensive style of teaching on the only people who mattered—our students.

The design of what we decided to do was actually quite simple. The three of us—S. Winifred Morgan, Susan Rustick and myself—agreed to reconfigure the ways in which our sections of freshman English met and the ways in which we allocated our instructional time. There were four sections involved, three sections of English 102 (the second course of the required two semester freshman sequence), and one section of English 101 (the first course of the sequence). All four sections met on a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule. All of us agreed to do the following:

1) To cancel the regular Friday meetings of our sections, and to replace these class meetings by 20-30 minute conferences with each student, on a two-week rotation.

2) To meet as a group for an hour every other week to discuss what we were doing, what we were trying, and how it was working.

3) To act as “outside evaluators” for one another in the grading of student papers: essentially, this meant that some papers from each class would be graded by at least two members of the group,
using criteria developed and agreed upon by the group as a whole, in order to ensure consistency in the way we assessed our students' progress.

4) To participate in assessment of the effects of the “reconfigured” model during and after the semester.

These were the only stipulations for the group as a whole; we deliberately steered clear of anything that would require us to re-plan the whole content of our courses, so other aspects of pedagogy differed rather widely among the four sections. There were the obvious differences created by the course contents of 101 and 102 (102 at Edgewood concentrates on research methodology and longer papers, while 101 includes a mix of shorter personal and analytical papers). There were also differences in general teaching style. One of us made fairly heavy use of timed in-class writings, while the other two did not. One section required students to submit a portfolio of papers at the end of the term, with unlimited prior revisions of papers; the other sections reviewed drafts of papers and then allowed more limited revisions after each paper was graded. One section made heavy use of journal writing. One section incorporated the outside evaluations of papers formally into the course grade, while the other three made use of them only in an advisory capacity.

We viewed all of these differences as an acceptable — and in fact a desirable — part of the collaboration. The project was not intended to enforce a program of pedagogy or to standardize teaching methods in the department, but rather to serve as a framework within which members of the group could explore and reinforce the effects of more highly individualized instruction on what is traditionally seen as a rather resistant “service course” population.

We're almost through with the first semester of our collaboration now. All the results aren't in yet, of course. Our assessment plan for student writing, in particular — the measures that will give us a clearer idea of just what impact we have had on the nature of our students' revision processes, their attitudes toward writing, and the quality of their written products — needs a year to run before we can speak confidently of our findings. But the workability of the plan has already proven itself and some of what we've discovered in the process is turning out to be a little surprising, both to us and to many of our colleagues and administrators.

First of all, there's the work load. That was our greatest fear going into the project. During the semester prior to our collaboration, I had held five 20–30 minute conferences with every student in two sections of honors freshman English, and I had ended the term with some serious worries about burnout; the prospect of holding conferences with every student in a two-week cycle seemed intimidating. When colleagues from other departments heard about what we were planning, their reactions ranged from admiring to incredulous: “You're really going to be putting in the hours” seemed to be the consensus response; they generally thought we were being pretty noble, but they were fairly sure we were crazy, too.

What we discovered, however, was that the popular wisdom about the extra work student conferencing required didn’t apply in our case. Because of the way we structured our collaboration, we really hadn’t increased our workload that significantly. Since we were commenting on every paper and every draft in person, exhaustive written comments became redundant; we quickly stopped using them except for specific, targeted areas of concern for individual students. The reduction in work load was significant. Commenting on a paper in writing takes about twenty minutes per student, and with one less class preparation per week the time we were spending in conferences just about balanced out.

There were scheduling difficulties, of course;
anyone who has tried to juggle times for twenty to forty people—all of whom may have jobs, sports practices, theatre rehearsals, and a full load of classes—knows what a tangle that can be. But the problems were solvable, and it didn’t take long for the weeks to fall into a manageable rhythm.

We also had some early worries about administrative reactions to a project that involved reducing the number of times classes met. So far these have proven groundless. S. Winifred, who is the senior faculty member of the group and the organizing force behind the project, took care to clear our experiment with the Academic Dean at the very start, and has kept her informed of our progress throughout the semester. As a result, the administrative attitude has been consistently supportive.

There could still be further problems, of course. Given the current fiscal situation in higher education, any reduction of class time could be seen as a reason for reevaluation of credit hours, faculty load, or financial support. However, two things have emerged from our experience that offer strong arguments against any such reevaluation.

First, and most obvious, is the fact that our load has not decreased at all; what we’ve managed to do is to keep the load at manageable levels, so that the intensive conferencing is at least possible. We can document the work involved if necessary, and so could anyone else who tried a similar arrangement.

Second, and perhaps more persuasive from an institutional point of view, is the possible impact on student retention of conference-intensive teaching. One of the factors which has consistently emerged as important in retention of students past the freshman year is close personal contact with individual faculty members—something which regular conferencing unquestionably encourages. Given the increasing concern with student retention over the past decade or so, I think we might argue that we are in a rather special position for fostering this specific and important institutional goal.

There is more involved than just contact time, too. One of the most prominent effects of our conference-intensive model for freshman English has been that we have gotten to know our students much better, and have been able to track and support them much more personally and individually, than ever before.

Everyone has had the experience of losing a student due to family problems, or difficulties at work, or simply the emotional malaise that often goes with the freshman year in college—outside forces which build up to unbearable levels and only come into the open after it is too late for academic first aid. When students are coming in for conferences on every assignment, diagnosis occurs much earlier, and sometimes we can do something about the problems before they become catastrophic.

We can’t be academia’s ambulance crews, of course. I lost someone this semester, in spite of all my efforts. I can’t put his troubles into print, and I wouldn’t even if I thought I could. But, while he was in difficulties in his other classes, he was managing to managing to perform quite creditably in mine; according to one senior administrator, his freshman English class was the one thing that would have allowed him to stay on—the one thing, in fact, that kept him from being formally dismissed before he made his own decision to withdraw. We didn’t retain him; but I like to think that at least we increased his chances. All this may seem

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SITING A TREE

The basic labor an act of faith
begun with patience
and prophesies of water
wind and light.
The earth turning
darkly beneath you
into something so high
so unlikely and full
of bird and bird song.

Some deep foreshadowing
of some spring yet to be
in which to sit not complacently
in the sunny stretch
of youth and expectancy
but in the cool repose
of one damn thing you did
when you meant to
so many years ago.

— Bruce Taylor
peripheral, though—the logistical tinsel and political wrappings of what is still primarily an academic endeavor. Important as workload and retention may be for the business of education, to a serious teacher of writing there can still be only one meaningful bottom line: Are we helping our students learn to write more effectively?

There are no solid answers to this question yet. Worthwhile assessment takes time, and one semester simply isn't enough. But we have had time to gather impressions, at least, and so far those are almost wholly positive.

For one thing, there have been noticeable changes in the ways our students are using the conferences. Since the conference is a habitual feature of the curriculum, students have become more comfortable with the prospect of sitting down face-to-face with us. For the most part, they have become less passive, less prone simply to listen and try to do what “teacher says.”

What I am observing among my own students is a greater sense of ownership of their writing; they are more willing to make substantial changes in their work, and less inclined to treat revision as a copy-editing exercise. Fully half of my students have surprised me with major re-thinking and rewriting of papers that I would have sworn were dead ends for them — and they are often revising in ways that I had not specifically suggested.

I am not convinced that the finished products are necessarily “better” than the products from other classes I have taught, at least in the sense that they would get higher scores if they were graded comparatively. The revisions are often messy, struggling affairs. But if the continual conferencing hasn't produced polished pieces of finished prose, it does seem to have encouraged the sort of persistent risk-taking that promotes — or perhaps embodies — real learning.

So what does it all come down to? I think we have demonstrated at least three things:

First, we have shown to our own satisfaction that a conference-intensive style of teaching is workable within the curricular framework of a traditional freshman composition course. Not only can we meet with every student for extended conferences every other week, but we can do it fairly comfortably. We haven't had to skimp on the conferences; it's not the kind of quixotic endeavor so many of our colleagues at first assumed it must be.

Second, in a time of shrinking budgets and increased accountability for higher education, we are in a position to play an important role in the institutional mission. Retention of students is not just financially advantageous for an academic institution; it is an important part of the educational work we are engaged in, if curricular coherence and planning have any meaning.

Finally — and this is the one element without which all others would be inconsequential — we are making a difference in the way writing gets taught. Although it will be a while yet before we have the final results from our assessment process, I would argue that my students are writing better because they are thinking more and struggling harder, and that their thought and struggle have real meaning for the academic enterprise—and real impact on what they will do in college and later. And that, above everything else, is a goal worth working for.

FISHERMEN AT NIGHT

Across the river the Hmong
men are fishing. They are shining flashlights
into the black swollen water to attract a bite.
The river itself is lit in sulfur ripples,
the neon from the city lights, ignoring
the mens' softer more concentrated hue. The anger in
their casts, water breaking open
for slivers of metal and flesh.

Their story is eaten by the larger story;
the guerilla war in Laos, the cold turning of backs
the vines and fronds weeping
Agent Orange. Their journey is the one
of the old saints; the binge, the censure of light,
the journey back, unknown, unable to tell anyone
what they had seen.

Their language comes across water as water;
soft roll, splashes, rolling in the eddy of a vowel.
The men, squatting on the shore wound to the tension
of springs. Lines cast, holding still,
and hoping, with small stars
in their hands.

—Tyler Crogg
If music be the food of love, play on,” commands Orsino, the Duke of Illyria, with words that begin Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*. The Duke’s response to unrequited love might prove an effective strategy for the classroom teacher in dealing with students who are reluctant to respond to literature.

A quarter century of experience teaching teenagers along with a decade of lessons learned from raising two of my own has provided me with primal glimpses into the workings of that often troubled and troubling species. Two of the socially acceptable entities that fuel them, to borrow from the Duke, are food and music.

During the spring of the year the fancy of my graduating seniors turns to thoughts of nearly anything but twentieth-century British poetry. I attempted to remedy the situation by having each senior present a poem to the class, offering a biographical sketch of the author, an interpretive reading of the poem, and a verbal analysis of it.

For most of my students the reading and the biographical materials caused few problems. But the verbal analysis of the poem was a challenge. Sometimes it seemed that even though a student had comprehended the poem, that the understanding remained uncommunicated, perhaps for lack of an appropriate vocabulary.

Those of you who were teaching in the 1970s may remember Peter Elbow and his support-group approach toward the teaching of composition. Rather than have students master a technical vocabulary for analyzing prose style, young writers were encouraged to speak of the writing metaphorically. If it were an animal, for example, what might it be? The unfortunate writer whose ponderous style was deemed an elephant might envy the work of his classmate that was likened to a lark. And so forth.

My students were told that their poetry presentations were to be accompanied by food and music. Both were to be appropriate for the poem presented, either in a literal or abstract sort of way. And through this appropriateness, the food and music would serve as metaphorical comments on elements of theme and style.

I could tell immediately that I had the kids’ interest. “Music,” they asked, “any kind of music?” The answer was yes, as long as they could explain its appropriateness for the poem. In my classroom I have a sound system for playing records, tapes, or CDs. The music could also be performed live.

The music might form a focal point for the presentation; that is, after an appropriate introduction, we could sit quietly and listen to a selection. Or, it could be playing
softly in the background to establish a mood during the reading and discussion of the poem.

Students had similar options with the food. The only requirement was that actual food be brought to class. It could be shown and explained as a visual aid, or the presenter could bring enough food for everyone in the class to have a treat.

The unit was a wonderful success in many respects. First of all, nothing creates a classroom cohesiveness like sharing food and music. For that reason, the activity might be good at the beginning of a semester or for the adjustment in attitude of a difficult class. Adolescents surround themselves with music. Subsequently, they often feel most comfortable when music becomes a part of their classroom environment. And teens’ identities are linked with their tastes in music. When a kid plays music that he likes for you, he or she is sharing in an important way.

Just as when we share food. Breaking bread together is a primal activity. Something basic happens when you eat with others, especially when food is shared, and more so when the food is a gift. Both the sharing of food and the sharing of music were infinitely humanizing activities.

And social activities. The discussion of literature is ideally a social activity, too. But sometimes in the classroom a discussion of literature becomes a lecture or limited conversation before a captive audience. The added elements of food and music provoked far more discussion of the of the poems than had earlier solitary abstract searches for theme or style. Students offered one another tapes and CDs, discussed relative appropriateness of selections, and occasionally consulted the music teachers for advice.

Parents sometimes became involved, too. While a student might doubt Mom or Dad’s ability to explicate a poem, the same student has more confidence in a parent’s knowledge of food. I learned of some lively debates about food appropriateness that occurred at home the evening before a poem was to be presented!

The choices that students made were intriguing. Some musical selections were abstract, chosen to underscore the mood of a poem. Others were linked to a theme, selected because of a title or because of lyrics. Some were chosen for literal reasons, because of an object or event mentioned in the poem. While this latter approach is not as useful in terms of literary discussion, it nonetheless allows a broader range of students to participate.

Although most of the presenters brought tapes or CDs, one of my students, who knew that I played flute, asked me to play a particular piece for the reading. (Amateur musicians always are searching for an audience; of course I consented!)

One of my students who is a musician listened carefully to the structure of the instrumental piece that she had chosen, and read stanzas at musical cues that she had established during her preparation for a highly polished performance.

The unit especially pleased me because it seemed that every student was better prepared for a presentation — and more comfortable during the performance — than for earlier units.

I was also delighted with the approach because I am convinced that literature should be engaged on a number of levels and from different angles. Sometimes poetry is felt as well as understood and sometimes it must be felt before it can be understood.

Since that first successful experiment, I have used variations on the theme. It works well with other forms of literature; not long ago I used it for group discussion of short stories. And other elements may be added. For one activity, I had students locate appropriate illustrations from art prints and books.

Just as the Duke’s love was finally requited, so might yours of literature with your students. “If music be the food of love, play on —”
If one should ask most English majors about their primary motivation for choosing that field, the answer he/she would most likely receive is that the candidate has developed an interest in, if not love of, literature. And most people preparing to be middle/secondary English teachers are English majors and thus share the same predilection. Few college students nowadays wish to concentrate in English linguistics. A larger number express a preference for writing as a primary interest, but as the turn of the century approaches, it is literature which remains at the top of the list — and by a wide margin.

Those English majors who opt for teacher preparation aspire to teach literature more than language or writing, as would follow logically. And, as Harold Herber has so often said, “We teach the way we were taught.” It is in this bit of wisdom we find the rub. Such aspiring teachers, as juniors and seniors, take most of the courses from professorial-level instructors employed by departments of English. Their main purpose, those senior faculty members, is to produce literary scholars. Most are uninterested in the fact that a significant proportion of their undergraduate students may be enrolled as seekers of the teaching certificate as well as the baccalaureate degree. They focus on the nature of the text at hand and display no concern with potential problems of understanding which that text may pose for less mature, less motivated adolescent readers. Moreover, the great challenge for most of them is to deal with and explicate the more subtle, intricate, and profound literary selections which fall within the sphere of their particular literary specialty.

Consequently, those undergraduates in such classes who are preparing to be middle/secondary teachers rarely if ever get up the nerve to ask how aspects of meaning or style might be presented to a neophyic, often indifferent audience. And these prospective teachers are aware that their future clientele may well consist of students from the at-risk, multi-cultural, TV dominated ranks; i.e., kids who can’t or more frequently won’t read anything, let alone the Great Books of the Western World. Thus the question of how to make certain texts meaningful to audiences such as those described above go largely unuttered in such classes.

To return to the scholar/teachers of literature, it is now timely to analyze their tools for explication. One of the most frequently used is the assigned reading from scholarly texts or journal articles. Such assignments, most frequently termed “required collateral reading” proliferate senior college English course syllabi. Students flock to the Reserve Room in the University library to find and read them, largely because such texts are referred to often in course examinations and/or term written projects. They are assigned on a “read it or else” basis.

The scholarly, critical documents noted above represent the most articulate expression of literary lore of which their assigners are currently aware. They usually reflect the most eloquent, often extremely technical commentary on the literary texts to which they refer. Undergraduates confronted
with them usually must summon up all their critical reading capacities in digging up the “correct” interpretive meaning on which they may well be tested. It’s often a struggle but to avoid doing so probably means that the students in question would face mid-term and final examinations unprepared. They must do so critically because, when alluding to such texts in such examinations, they must express pertinent meanings in their own language; that is, they must translate meaning.

All of the above is well and good; it is the stuff of the evolving scholar of serious literature. But what is the relationship between this endeavor and the teaching-to-kids role which they will soon assume as student teachers and which, arguably, they will play for the rest of their adult professional lives? To the writer of this piece, the key figure is the English Methods person.

I would argue that one of the Methods teacher’s significant roles is to assist undergraduates to move to a second level of translation in dealing with literary scholarship/criticism. The question which these young people need to ask, once they’ve figured out what the text says to them, is how they can use what it offers them as teachers of literature to middle/secondary students. They need to be eternally mindful of the fact that their students are not English majors at a college or university and thus must be engaged at a lower level of abstraction, often a considerably lower one. In doing so, these prospective teachers will need all the help which their Methods teachers can provide for them.

The place of literature in middle/secondary curricula is an issue which needs to be faced in the English Methods class. In that class, it needs to be seen in relation to adolescent psychology, relative reading abilities, relative cultural literacy (Anglo-Saxon, that is), correlative experience, and media addiction, to name a few factors which either enhance or inhibit literary understanding in the classroom. More specifically, it is the responsibility of the Methods teacher to assist undergraduates to translate the literary scholarship they assimilated in the lit classes into tools for teaching their new, more indifferent, less sophisticated students. Such assistance is necessary if students/prospective teachers are to gain any pedagogical value from the literary commentary they are assigned to study.

Here are a few examples of procedures which Methods teachers may utilize in their classes to guide their undergraduates through such “second translations.” The first is taken from the First Essay in Northrop Frye’s renown Anatomy of Criticism:

... Critical statements with “must” or “should” in their predicates are either pedantries or tautologies, depending on whether they are taken seriously or not. Thus a dramatic critic may wish to say “all plays must have unity of action.” If he is a pedant, he will then try to define unity of action in specific terms. But creative power is versatile, and he is sure to find himself sooner or later asserting that some perfectly reputable dramatist, whose effectiveness on the stage has been proved over and over again, does not exhibit the unit of action he has defined, and is consequently not writing what he regards as plays at all. The critic who attempts to apply such principles in a more liberal or more cautious spirit will soon have to broaden his conceptions to the point, not of course of saying, but of trying to conceal the fact that he is saying, “all plays that have unit of action must have unit of action, or, more simply and more commonly, “all good plays must be good plays.” (26)

*Succinct translation:* Be careful about making or believing statements of judgment about literary works which emphasize absolutes. Also be skeptical of the critic who applies rigid criteria to each work. Be more willing to judge each selection on its own merits.

*Use in the Classroom:* Students should make up their own minds about the meaning and quality of each text they read. Teachers should not demand that students label great works as “great.” When students make statements of judgment, however, they should be willing to listen to disparate arguments from peers. They should also back up these judgments by alluding to the text itself.

Here’s another critical excerpt, this time from Wayne Booth’s influential and frequently quoted *The Rhetoric of Fiction.*

When we remember the many cumbersome “mirror-views” in modern fiction—“What he saw in the mirror was a man of middle heighten — we see how much trouble the
desire to dramatize such descriptive detail can cause. Some situations do, indeed, lend themselves to this kind of pseudo-drama, particularly when what is seen in the mirror, and the fact of the character's long, self-absorbed gaze, are themselves clues to help us grasp his nature. But even when the mirror is thus truly functional, more concentrated information can often be given by maintaining a reliable narrator's voice independent of the character's subjective vision.

"Though the sleep, short-sighted countenance and rather bald head reflected in the looking-glass were of such an insignificant type that at first sight they would certainly not have attracted particular attention in any one, yet the owner of the countenance was satisfied with all that he saw in the looking-glass." Thus Dostoevski, in The Double (1846), writing before point of view had been much troubled about, makes his opening description largely dramatic and at the same time uses his own commentary to betray his character's egotism. By taking an omniscient position he can do in four lines what any other method would require far more to do. Anyone who tries to translate the passage into a completely objective portrayal of Golyadkin's own thoughts without losing any of the effect, including the clarity, will see how much he has sacrificed. (172)

Succinct Translation: Avoid rigid pronouncements such as "first person limited" or "third person omniscient" point of view when examining works of fiction. Accept the fact that many well established writers of fiction employ point of view flexibly and imaginatively.

Use in the Classroom: Read each segment of a novel, short novel, or short story slowly and carefully. Look for clues as to the angle of vision from which the story is being told. Don't be surprised if the point of view shifts during the story.

Lawrence Perrine's Sound and Sense is a popular and widely used text on understanding, interpreting, and appreciating poetry. Here's a brief excerpt from that text.

Poetry, finally, is a kind of multi-dimensional language. Ordinary language —

the kind we use to communicate information — is one-dimensional. It is directed at only part of the listener, his understanding. Its one-dimension is intellectual. Poetry, which is language used to communicate experience, has at least four dimensions. If it is to communicate experience, it must be directed at the whole man, not just at his understanding. It must involve not only his intelligence but also his senses, his emotions, and his imagination. Poetry, to the intellectual dimension, adds a sensual dimension, an emotional dimension, and an imaginative dimension. (10)

Succinct Translation: As contrasted with ordinary language, poetry can attract readers in at least four ways. Because it is directed to the whole person, it relates to the mind, the senses, the emotions, and the imagination.

Use in the Classroom: Read poems aloud, slowly, and with feeling. (The teacher should do lots of prepared, eloquent oral reading of poetry in the classroom.) Let the poem's words, phrases, rhythms, and rhymes have a chance to work on the imagination as well as the mind. Get lots of students involved in oral reading, choral reading, and shared responses.

The first two excerpts were critical reader of the text. In the third one, Perrine emphasized the interaction between text and reader. It provides, among other things, a transitional statement from a scholar who represents the currently popular "Reader-Response" approach to literary criticism. Below is presented a excerpt from the acknowledged leader of that movement, Louise Rosenblatt.

The text: Literature as Exploration.

When we read for some practical purpose, our attention is focused on the information or ideas or directions for action that will remain when the reading is over. Hence a paraphrase or a summary of a biology text or a rephrasing of the technical language of a law may be quite as useful as the original. Someone else can read the newspaper or a scientific work for us and summarize it acceptably. But no one can read a poem for us. The reader of the poem must have the experience himself. It may later have repercussions in actual life, but
as he sees the play or reads the novel or poem, he is intent on the pattern of sensations, emotions, and concepts it evokes. Because the text is organized and self-contained, it concentrates the reader’s attention and regulates what will enter into his consciousness. His business for the moment is to apprehend as fully as possible these images and concepts in relation to one another. Out of this arises a sense of an organized structure of perceptions and feelings which constitutes for him the aesthetic experience. (32-33)

Succinct Translation: When contrasted with expository or descriptive texts, poetry presents a special quality and need. While the former styles can be paraphrased or summarized by someone else, each individual must read and experience the poem on his/her own. The reader must allow the poem to invade his/her feelings and correlative experience rather than existing only as surface information.

Use in the Classroom: In keeping with Perrine’s statement, the teacher should allow the poem to affect the student’s total sensibilities. It should not be treated only for its cognitive, informative value but for the manner in which it involves the feelings, past revelations, and past images of each reader. Thus every student’s response is to be considered and valued, and disparity in response is not to be frustrated.

Literary scholarship can be useful to the English Methods teacher when it is shared — first, translated into comprehensible language, and second, into its implications for classroom teaching strategies. It is then that the Methods teacher can truly turn it to advantage.

Wishbone

for my father

She cooked the turkey herself that first year you were married, pulling apart the bird’s mucky innards and filling it with Stroehmann Bread stuffing, not nearly so dry as her mother made it, growing wetter with the sweat from her worrying palms, afraid she wasn’t doing things right. She filled that bird until it nearly burst, its stomach swelled like a pregnant woman finding comfort in another woman’s touch, skin shrinking back from either end like a wrinkled newborn, curled tight in its own juices.

At the table, you did the carving, separating light from dark, saving the skin for her. She forgot to make gravy, but you didn’t care because you had red wine and cranberry jelly from a can. You said love and made grace.

After dinner, you shared the wishbone, trying to split the V down the middle, but the bone was too soft and you were afraid to pull to hard, so you decided to let it go until later. But it was gone, an accident, buried with the trash on Friday, forgotten beneath plate scrapings, turkey guts and heart.

You thought you found that wish in the way she felt beneath you, her pelvis spread wide, legs pulling so that you couldn’t pull away, and years later when the nurses pulled howling red wishes from between those legs.

But somehow each Thanksgiving after, the wishes went to the children, while their mother sat watching the turkey die beneath her fingers, and you could only pray to have that wish back, wanting what might have happened if you’d pulled harder when the bone was soft.

— Jennifer Kraus
Team Teaching: A Case for Two Are Better than One

Marilyn Pitzner and Lois Kathan
Holmen High School

“We have had two teachers in a classroom before, but there was something different about this time. Most of the student teachers didn’t participate in the class quite like Mrs. Pitzner did. It was a nice change.”
— Amanda

Because of a very unique situation involving a classroom cooperating teacher (Lois Kathan) and a non-traditional student teacher (Marilyn Pitzner), this multi-voiced project reflects the benefits of team teaching as a continuing specific approach to teaching at the secondary level.

Despite having taught school for several years, Marilyn was entering the classroom as a practice teacher. The requirement to practice teach was a result of her desire to obtain additional licensing along with a master’s degree, and she had taken a leave-of-absence from her position as a sixth-grade teacher in order to meet that criterion.

Lois had been at Holmen High School since 1984, and working with student teachers has always played an important role in her professional career. Since the 1960s, many practicing teachers have benefited from her guidance.

To any observer, Marilyn is calm and collected; Lois tends to be rather flamboyant and frequently fragmented. Organizationally, Marilyn embodies the left-brain thinking mode, providing a holistic approach with concrete examples and sequential development. As for Lois, she often portrays a propensity for right-brain thinking, adding on-the-spot inspiration and humor. In the classroom interacting with students, these two hemispheres merge, providing students with truly holistic leadership, and although the personalities are distinctly unique, the teaching styles and philosophies are congruent.

Marilyn’s Voice

I left home early on a grimy January morning, and the classroom I entered that first day was a neon-lit room with huge, grass-green plants hugging a corner near a window adjacent to a desk cluttered with pudgy piles of papers. Next to the desk was a cozy corner with easy chairs guarded by a tall, filmy, black screen. Student work splattered the room.

It was the beginning of a term, so the students too were new to the classroom, and some appeared apprehensive, while others seemed prepared to test boundaries. Lois quickly established a setting in which students were respected, students were given a voice in classroom decisions, limits were clear, and the atmosphere was warm and full of smiles. On that day, I watched a kaleidoscope of faces move from empty indifference and curious apprehension to wide-eyed responsiveness under the gentle direction of a skillful educator.

Because I was an experienced teacher, Lois and I decided to approach the teaching of her sophomore writing classes and American literature class as a team. Both lesson planning and teaching were addressed cooperatively. I found this rewarding because I could be involved in all facets of daily activities, and because we could exchange strategies and materials!

Lois’s Voice

From neophyte teacher of the 1960s; to parent, business partner and volunteer of the 70s; to returning educator of the 80s; to trooper in the trenches of the 90s, the concepts of team and teamwork have
been an integral part of both my personal and professional life. This year, because of ninety-minute class periods, team planning and team teaching have been crucial to teachers and students alike. So when I was informed that my student teacher for this term would be an older, non-traditional, already-teacher student teacher, I anxiously awaited what I sensed would be a unique and mutually beneficial teaching-learning encounter.

When Marilyn first entered our classroom early that fateful morning in January, friendly eyes and a polished presence signaled confidence, sincerity and a genuine exuberance for her student teaching assignment. After only a few days of sharing, planning, talking, and listening—phenomenally tuned-in to common goals and compatible philosophies—we realized how reciprocally rewarding our time together would be both personally and professionally.

All Of Our Voices

As classroom facilitators, we provided an atmosphere conducive to learning and presented motivational materials and authentic activities so our students would be inspired to generate quality work. We allowed and encouraged students to discover meaning and answers, so ownership of learning and teaching could be realized and internalized.

Students were encouraged to accept us as a team through our attention to several details including using the term “we” when interacting with the class, having students list both teachers’ names on submitted work and having both of us respond with individual comments on all assignments. It quickly became apparent that there were numerous benefits to this approach. As a dedicated team, we complimented each other. According to Kelly, “It’s nice to have two teachers because each one has a different style of teaching. It adds variety and uniqueness to each day because each one has a different way to do things.” Matt concurred and commented, “The interesting part is that the student is influenced by two contrasting, conflicting, personalities and talents.”

As a result of our teaming, the audience for assessing student work had doubled. Yes, we did divide the paper load, but when one was done evaluating and responding to half of the papers, we switched and the other added a second response to each student’s paper. Little did we know how extremely important and beneficial this was for our students until they told us.

“I think it is better too when you correct homework and you both grade and talk about it.” — Lena.

“When we get comments back...it’s from two people. I think this is very neat.” — Ger.

“I like to hear the two different opinions on my writing assignment. It gives me a good idea of what people think, not just one person.” — Kim.

Another benefit that emerged from teaming was our ability to accommodate the divergent learning styles which emerged in the classroom by using various grouping strategies. We used pair and share, triads, small heterogeneous groups, and cooperative learning groups with specified roles. Students’ responses validated our grouping strategies.

“I like it. You can break the class into two groups and have a teacher for both.” — Brian.

“The small group discussions for Huckleberry Finn have been made possible by team teaching. Also, it’s useful when only half of the class wants to go to the computer lab.” — Chad.

“It worked out nice when some students were a little farther along in class so one teacher could take one group and the other teacher could work with the other students.” — Chris.

Research on Teaming

The students’ enthusiasm and support for our teamed approach is supported by research that has been done in the area of teaming. In the article “Teacher Collaboration in Secondary Schools,” Morton Inger stated that “Teachers who have worked together see substantial improvements in student achievement, behavior, and attitude.” We can attest to this through our observations and again by feedback from our students:

“It seems like we can get a whole lot more done in a day with two teachers than one, especially in this class.” — Scott.

“More kids were being helped because of the extra teacher.” — Chris.

“I really think that team-teaching is a good way to help students understand what is being taught.” — Darc.

“When you both talk it makes it more interesting.” — Ben.
Team teaching facilitated our keeping the students involved and on task. Potential problems were defused and a positive learning environment was fostered. According to Justin, "Team teaching made it harder to get away with stuff because you're more closely watched." But he added, "I think that overall you learn more this way." Uriah echoed these thoughts with a similar comment. "The bad thing about having two teachers teaching you is you get caught talking and fooling around easier. A good thing about two teachers is when one teacher is busy usually the other can help you."

Teachers as well as students can profit from teaming because it affords them an opportunity to share ideas and resources, as well as an occasion to observe other teaching styles and techniques. Furthermore, they can support one another's strengths and accommodate weaknesses (Inger, 1991). In our teaming, evidence of these benefits was apparent. We clarified classroom procedures together, balanced one another in group discussions and exchanged a wealth of accumulated materials.

A study at Prestonburg Community College in Kentucky revealed that team teaching enhanced learning for instructors by creating a situation where teachers could compare teaching methods. Students' attitudes and examination scores were also positively affected (Bennin, 1991).

**Conclusion**

Although our unique situation was conducive to team teaching, teaming can easily be incorporated and adapted in many ways, because as our world moves into the new century, team learning, team teaching, and team playing have become crucial. Knowledge is doubling in less than two years, and no one can know everything. Think tanks, partnerships, collaboration, teaching teams—they will continue to be a necessary part of business and education. The most current reform in education indicates the need for more relevant teacher collaboration.

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**Final Thoughts: Marilyn**

My experience in teaming has had a significant impact, and I will return to the classroom a different person than when I left it. I am eager to put to use the new strategies and techniques that I learned from an exceptional teacher. Providing authentic audiences, giving students a voice in classroom management, remembering the importance of humor, being flexible, and looking at the broad picture will be part of my teacher's toolbox, and I will remember that as it is often said, "There are no problems, only creative solutions." When teachers work together and share knowledge and resources, students benefit, teachers benefit, and ultimately the field of education is positively affected.

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**Final Thoughts: Lois**

As a result of this authentic, most rewarding team teaching opportunity with Marilyn, my own philosophy of education has been reinforced. It has encouraged reflection, introspection, and self-assessment. Almost daily we reminded each other, as well as our students, that it is what we think we know that might prevent us from learning more. Also, Marilyn's calming quietude has reminded me of the importance of patience and perseverance. Overall, teaming has revealed a renewal of our commitment to the concepts of quality.

Our formal nine week cooperative teaching and learning venture has come to an end, but we will, no doubt, continue to collaborate for future classroom exchanges. In this scenario, all good things will NOT come to an end.

"One person is full of imagination but two are unbelievable. Double the teacher, double the help, and double the understanding." —Rena.

**Works Cited**

Just Hanging Around
Field Research in Language

Mary Meiser
University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire

Prologue: Indiana Jones and the Sea of Language

Most students have enjoyed the Indiana Jones films but probably never noticed that Indy was a first rate archeologist. His skills of observation, analysis, and inference honed on academic pursuits draw him into less mundane adventures — where he often escapes murder or mayhem by virtue of those same skills.

Although our students are awash in a verbal sea, sometimes riding it well and other times buffeted and pounded, seldom are they asked to examine this world. Nor are they often asked to consider verbal and nonverbal behavior an important data base for learning about others and the various cultures they inhabit as adolescents. Consequently, they lose opportunities to develop a keener sense of observation, as well as applied skills of analysis, classification, inference and speculation. Although we assume and hope that our students never have to face the death-defying adventures of an Indiana Jones, we know that they will indeed face verbal adventures. Preparing them to handle this verbal sea is part of our job, and one way to make it both instructive and fun is through field research, through “just hanging around.”

Just Hanging Around: Field Research in Language

“Just hanging around” is a structured research and writing project that unfolds over six to nine weeks. Students may work independently or collaboratively, but their goal is the collection and analysis of language data from a site in the school or community. Similar to that of other writing projects, the teacher’s role is one of guide: provide the basic instructions for choosing a site and for collecting and analyzing data; model a form for reporting the results; check progress of data collection and analysis. For the most part, students are on their own — and in the process gain valuable experience not only in analytic thinking but also in patience and discipline. If a written report is the final reporting form, students also gain experience in narration and factual description, often enhancing their vocabulary through a need for precise yet colorful language.

The Task

Students investigate “language in use” in whatever setting is of interest to them and appropriate for their age group. Over the years, my students have hung out in such diverse places as gyms, bus stations, restaurants, television lounges, courtrooms, and school cafeterias. They have eavesdropped on shoppers in the Eau Claire malls, where one theatrical and enterprising male wore “costumes” to learn if patrons would react to his garb (and they did). They have tutored seven-year-old Hmong students, Hmong mothers, and high school exchange students from South America. They have examined the language of Sesame Street and Days of Our Lives. They have analyzed the back stage jargon of world class jazz musicians, most notably the horn sections of Prince, Paul Simon, and the Minnesota Orchestra. They have traveled the Internet in search of dialogue in The Village, but one of the many chatboards available to computer enthusiasts.

The goal of their observation was sufficient language data for analysis of how language occurs or is used in that specific setting. On the basis of
Over the years, my students have hung out in such diverse places as gyms, bus stations, restaurants, television lounges, courtrooms, and school cafeterias.

Language in the Lounge

Reg studied viewer conversations during that most enduring of soaps, Days of Our Lives. He also observed nonverbal behavior linked to the program itself. With a ratio of 20 female viewers to 4 males, he wondered why men wouldn't flock to a room jampacked with women, especially since he knew many males are hooked on Days (even arranging class schedules around it). Then he discovered a possible reason. One of Days villains, Curtis Brown, appeared on screen and called a female character a number of pejorative female terms, language that would have been on the cutting room floor in earlier years. Reg wrote: "As Curtis laughs maniacally, all of the women in the room turn around and glare at the four men in the back of the room. The men look sheepishly at each other and then at the floor or ceiling, apparently hoping for something to happen to divert the scornful women's attention away from them." After further, daily observation, Reg decided it was a "subtle form of male-bashing." A pre-law major, Reg most certainly is still hypothesizing about language and the human animal.

Language in the Classroom

Working with two first graders, one Hmong and one Caucasian, Nick observed not only language behavior and acquisition but also responses born of diverse cultures. When he asked the children about the hair color of a story character, he learned this: "Erin's answers were very straightforward and utilized modifiers like sand and light. Pa told me 'His hair is yellow.' I wondered if any native speaker would call someone's hair yellow. Erin answered my question when she said, 'Silly. It's not yellow it's blonde. You can't have yellow hair.'" Nick also had a first-hand lesson in native language acquisition from Erin's talk of the Easter bunny: "He brought me markers. He brought my sister candy. He brung my brother lots more candy." As Nick noted his amazement, he wrote, "Here was a primary example of variance in verb tense that could have been lifted off a textbook page." For Nick, now a middle-school English teacher in suburban Minneapolis, the lessons taught by Pa and Erin were a direct link with his future.

Language in the Men's (and Women's) Room

Enlisting the help of a female friend, Brian examined his fascination with campus bathroom stalls as a "sounding board for fledging poets, would-be politicians, social critics and those with a religious bent." He tested his hypothesis that "graffiti represents the true underbelly of the U.S., with notable differences between the graffiti found in male and female bathrooms." But even he was surprised at the results: the biting negativity, the pervasive homophobia of the males; the affection and sustained positiveness of females. Brian, a psychology/philosophy graduate, no doubt continues...
to ponder gender differences in his work with disabled teens.

**Language among the Hornheads**

A hornhead himself, Steve stationed himself backstage with Prince’s musicians. He noted: “While the conversation was furiously paced, the basis of my notes was enough to create a focus for future observations: The idea that jazz/rock musicians praise each other by applying negative terms to the performer and the music. In other words, “bad s—” is actually “good s—.” Steve later learned that classical musicians tend to remain literal in their evaluative statements: “To the orchestral trumpet players, a ‘great fanfare’ is no less than a great fanfare. Steve’s life will be spent among hornheads; this was only a beginning of a new language odyssey.

**Language on the Internet**

Sara noted oddities in the way Internet users interacted with one another and linked it to the alias, eventually testing her hypothesis by taking on different aliases, gender-based. She also observed that “gossip is the cornerstone of Internet. The majority of the time is spent talking about other people. And surprisingly, people acquire reputations like net-flirt, village-idiot, and, as in real life, users are hurt by this.” Sara learned first-hand that subcultures evolve their own language rules and “strangers beware” — lessons she will take to her own new sub-culture in the corporate world.

**Lessons Learned**

As a teacher, my pleasure in this project lies in a most basic student observation: Language has the capacity to delight and confound us, to capture and destroy us, to lead and fascinate us. No student walks away untouched by the usefulness, and the power, of language. Further, no student emerges without an enhanced sense of nonverbal language. Embedded in these lessons are the keener eye and the attuned ear, as well as a deeper appreciation of age, gender, and ethnicity. Students understand better the role of environment and context in shaping what we say and how we act. These lessons alone are worth the time and effort, but there is yet another significant benefit to “just hanging around” — a challenging analytic workout.

Students must grapple with what appears initially as amorphous data. And only they can make sense out of it: relying on their observation and interpretation of verbal and nonverbal acts, trusting in their own “power” to get things right. To reach conclusions, they must do the final classification of data through sustained analysis and synthesis. And in the process, they must come to depend upon subtle skills of inference and speculation. The older and more capable the student, the more these processes, but all students are capable of observing and commenting on the language around them.

**Epilogue**

Each student can become Indiana Jones in the Sea of Language. We just need to provide them with basic tools, confidence in their ability to survey and make sense of the situation, and then, set them adrift. And sometimes, even we will be amazed at their “archeology” skills and the “treasures” they turn up.

**The “How to” of the Hanging Around Project**

**Choosing a Site**

First, brainstorm possible sites with the whole class, also telling them what is off limits: their home, family, and friends. Explain that close scrutiny of those they live with would not result in good data. Their biases and lack of objectivity would cloud the results. Make certain they understand that choosing a site is key to their success; if they really aren’t interested in it, time is utter drudgery. Give them a few days or a weekend to consider various sites. Then ask that they turn in a notecard with the following information:

A) their site for observation  
B) why they chose it  
C) when (days/time) they plan to observe  
D) what they hope to discover, hunches about the site  
E) if they need permission to be there

If the site is public domain, such as McDonalds or Mall, there’s no need to alert anyone to the project. If the site is a school, hospital, or office,
students — with your help — must seek permission to be there and to use data from this site. Students should learn about anonymity and confidentiality if needed. Students may be participant-observers. They may also use “informants” from their site, provided permission is received to use such information. If interviews are appropriate, students will need your help in forming questions.

**Brainstorm**

possible sites with the whole class, also telling them what is off limits: their home, family, and friends.

**Working Together**

There’s no reason why students with similar interests cannot join eyes and ears for this project. They should both take notes and follow all the procedures on site. They should analyze their data individually before comparing notes and interpretations. You may choose to have them write individual reports or share an oral presentation equally.

**Collecting Language Data**

Students need a written guide sheet, discussion, and a dose of encouragement as they begin. Their first questions are usually those of “What do I look for?” and “What should I take down?” First, they have to know that initially few things will be clear. Only time on the site will provide a portrait of verbal and nonverbal behavior; time and analysis of emerging data will help them figure out what to take down. A key element of qualitative research lies in the emergence of data, the verification of patterns along the research path. For most students, this research methodology will be entirely new. Therefore, they need assurance that what is fuzzy will become clear with time. When they have enough time on-site, they will begin to see patterns forming around the following areas:

**Verbal Behavior**

**Topics of Conversation:** What do people talk about? How often and among whom? What purpose does the topic serve? Are there differences among pairs and groups? between genders? among different ages?

**Silence:** Is it present? How is it used? Does body language take the place of words? If so, what does it say?

**Gender:** Are there differences between male and female conversations? between females only? males only?

**Race/Ethnicity:** Are there differences linked to race/ethnic group? What characterizes language among these users? Do differences occur with mixed groups? Are there gender differences?

**Age:** What characterizes the language of different age groups? Are there also gender differences?

**Relationships:** Are chains of command present? Who dominates? How is control established and maintained? How do people enter and leave conversations? Are people excluded? How?

**Nonverbal Behavior**

**Body Language:** How do people use their bodies to express thoughts, personality, etc.? What gestures and/or facial expressions are typical when, how often, and in response to what situations? Are gender, racial/ethnic, or age differences involved in how people use body language?

**Spatial Behavior:** How do people place themselves relative to one another when standing? when seated? What distance from speaker is maintained? Do people lean into conversations? Is there a relationship to topic or setting? Do some stay apart and aloof? Are there gender, age, or racial/ethnic differences?

**Relationships:** Who’s involved with whom? to what degree? any exclusion? Who dominates? Are there gender, age, or avoidance behavior present?

Field notes are a continuous record of situations, events, conversations, nonverbal behavior — a running record of people, of things heard and observed. At the most general level, field notes are a chronological log of what was going on. Notes taken at the site are called “raw notes.” They are mostly descriptive, providing a portrait for later analysis: a physical description of setting, people, details of verbal and nonverbal behavior, account of events. Raw notes reveal the characteristics of sheer reporting: who, how many, who said what to whom, who moved where, how, what was going on. Raw notes often contain diagrams of the physical layout of the site, where people were situated, etc. Raw notes may include key words, phrases, verbatim material, notes to self about things to watch for or personal responses that could lead to bias. Once students have patterns, they may use a tally or code to record data.

**What to Code**

Students will develop a shorthand for recording information, a code that allows them to quickly take down and classify what’s going on. Provide some samples for them to get the idea:
Tell students that raw notes represent concrete behavior — not their interpretation. If they take verbatim information make sure they indicate that it is such by quote marks. And if they recall something after they leave the site, have them enter as best they can and note it as “after site visit.”

They will evolve cooked notes; their ideas or inferences will start to occur when they review the raw notes. Some comments may seem obvious and trivial, some far-fetched and rather improbable, and most will fall between those extremes, even appearing totally mundane. However, they should put down everything, no self-editing.

Students should know that they will have personal impressions and feelings. As observers or perhaps participant-observers, they quite normally have opinions about the place, people — emotional responses. Ask them to be honest and make a note of them. The honesty may allow them to see their biases later.

Additionally, the students should have notes for themselves: questions to help them gather additional info, for example, telling them to before the next observation.

How Long and How Full

Most students want specific information about how long and how full their notes should be. But there are no set rules here. A rule of thumb tells them that there should be enough to conjure up a vivid portrait once they are away from the scene. These are private documents, so students should not be afraid to comment freely about their observations.

Students do not have to write a formal report to present their findings. Informal discussion can serve as well for young or less able students. But for very capable students, the challenge of reporting findings in a field research format is a good one. For students interested in the potential of computer graphics (or students whom you want to draw into specific computer software), the report is a good vehicle. The field study is also a good place for students to use “I” as an appropriate pronoun in research writing.
A Fistful of Nouns and a Gutful of Feelings

Gary Jones
Gibraltar High School

If I wished to describe a forest, I might enumerate the trees, characterize their height and type, and describe the flora and fauna abounding there. Or, I might choose to evoke the forest by focusing on the feeling the woods creates in me, perhaps reverence, as if I were in a natural cathedral, or maybe desolation, as if I were the last of a vanishing species to walk the earth.

During the past quarter of a century when I have labored each evening to keep at bay the rising tides of student writing stacked about my chair, I have noted again and again that my best young writers select the latter path through the forest: they evoke rather than describe.

With this knowledge in hand, it is easy to stand before a class of budding writers and exhort, "Evoke! Evoke!" But that command alone will meet with approximately the same success that the admonition "Relax!" does when shouted at someone perishing from terror. However, just as relaxation techniques can be learned, so can the conjuring tricks of evocation.

First, a student writer must develop a vocabulary both for comprehending and for discussing this aspect of writing. A place to begin is with the concepts both literal and figurative. While less successful writing sometimes may be earthbound with unimaginative unsupported generalizations, good writing often soars with the connections drawn through figures of speech — the metaphors, similes, and personifications that give abstractions flesh.

An equally important part of the young writer's lexicon is the understanding of the terms connotation and denotation. They must be ever conscious of the associations the reader brings to particular colors, for example, or brand names, or song titles. It is not only what the word means, but how it feels.

Feeling quite naturally leads to a discussion of sensory impressions. Students need to be encouraged to respond in terms of the senses, especially the non-visual four.

Finally, illustrative details are essential to sketch a picture in the reader's mind. It is important to distinguish between an inventory and a discriminatory sampling of the choicest elements.

The above discussion is meaningless if it is not grounded in practical application. And conversely, appropriate application may eliminate the need for a detailed theoretical discussion.

As an exercise in non-literal writing, I developed the following writing assignment. It appeals both to my most and least sophisticated students; everyone easily achieves a feeling of success. It is an exploration of possibilities, and while the results are a poem, the techniques used have a logical extension to prose.

And a few of my students have created pieces that have enjoyed success in writing competitions.

Here are the directions:

1) Choose five nouns or noun phrases that might be associated with aspects of your personality to capture your identity, to present your portrait, to express the essence of your humanity.

For example, I as a teacher might select Musician, Reader, Cook, Runner, Teacher of English.

2) For each noun or noun phrase, create sensory imagery, dialogue, description, to make it vivid.
Here are samples for the above choices:

—Silvery notes of the flute, descending to gold, the winds of autumn, the sparkle of sun on a lake, the breath of being.

—Speak to me, Jon Hassler. Write me a letter, Tony Hillerman. Give me a call John Irving. Let me know when you’re in town, Anne Tyler.

—Pasta, spaghetti, fettuccine, linguine, the savory scent of tomato sauce, a little Italian sausage or maybe scallops, lots of garlic, some good red wine; yeah, maybe I’ll cook.

—Sweat, permeating T-shirts, defying laundry detergents. Moldy shoes, foul beyond belief, taking a breather out on the porch. Ah, the scent of a runner.

—Essay. To try. To write. To read. To face a pile of writing assignments that begins in September and finally finishes in June. Unpleasant — Not at all — a smorgasbord of feelings, fears, dreams, frustrations, hopes, triumphs, gripes, ideas, and arguments.

3) Arrange some or all of these phrases into a pattern that might be a poem:

Sweat
Permeating T-shirts
Defying laundry detergents
Lots of garlic
Some good red wine
Yeah, maybe I’ll cook
Essay
To try
To write
To read
Let me know when you’re in town, Ann Tyler
The winds of autumn
The sparkle of sun on a lake
The breath of being
Ah, the scent of a runner

Some of your students might complain that their poem makes no sense. You point out to them that their writing may not contain a narrative, it may not have a logical literal development of an idea, but it makes every kind of sense. The trees will seem real in the forests they evoke, or the jungles, groves, or lone oaks. With any luck at all, that fistful of nouns should produce a gutful of feelings, and maybe a few rather sophisticated thoughts. And with still more good fortune, there may be some carryover into their expository writing as well.

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**THIS PINE, THESE KNEES**

On my knees before this pine
which we have chosen so carefully together
from droves stacked ten feet high,
all numbered in hues of green,
placed in perfect parallel lines
from where our car is parked
to the end of what seems an infinite lot,
pruned from the top down
for years by an immaculate hand,
branch by branch.
I pray each stroke of the saw blade,
sawdust to angel dust to snow
and a tree I drag behind
in my raw, stale fingers
red and uncalloused
leaving only a stump
unable to disclose its
silent death. And
those next passers-by
unable to gauge the beauty
by the stump alone.

— Scott Jelinek

**RIVERWALK HOTEL, ROOM 469**

You barely speak and I wonder
what the rest of your life is.

Your wife fixes dinner
for herself, but she sets

a place for you out of
habit. It comforts her

to see your spot at the table
normal like every other night.

She feels your absence when
she crawls between the sheets

of the bed you’ve shared.
You crawl into the hotel

bed and wonder.

— Jayne Blodgett
This article describes a composition course structure that pursues three separate goals. These goals, often seen in conflict, are here combined so as to reinforce each other. The first of these goals is to use proven and defensible strategies for teaching writing; in general, this means using the writing-process model. The second goal is to maintain challenging expectations for all students; with the process approach, many teachers find it difficult to keep the best writers thoroughly engaged. The third goal is to preserve manageable work loads for the instructors; one complaint offered against process methodology is that it can increase the number of drafts and papers that teachers need to read in order to render a grade.

Many teachers of student writers have found through years of experience that these three goals are difficult to achieve simultaneously. For example, some instructors find that using a process-based approach as suggested by research has yielded relatively high grades for relatively mediocre work. In other instances, teachers have found themselves having to choose between responding carefully to students’ writing and finding time to live their own lives. On the other hand, no conscientious teaching professionals would really advocate returning to product-based, skill-and-drill English courses simply to reduce their own grading burden or to uphold externally derived, arbitrary standards of writing competence.

In a nutshell, what has made the difference for us is to refocus our attention away from grades and, instead, upon due dates. We have permitted ourselves to let go of the idea that a certain number of discrete paper assignments constitutes the required work of the course. Instead, we have established a fixed number of due dates for which students turn in a paper—whichever paper they happen to be working on. It is our hope—and so far, our experience—that students will focus much more specifically on the writing process itself and, especially, on revision skills, rather than on the grade they hope to get.

Our enthusiasm for this approach—arising not only from our own enjoyment and satisfaction in teaching the course, but also from our observation of students’ progress—prompted us to describe our system to a group of teachers at the 1995 WCTE annual convention. After a lively session several teachers urged us to communicate this to a wider audience. We hope that if we offer details about the components of the approach we use, its advantages and disadvantages, and some of the nuts-and-bolts issues of schedules, sequencing, and timing, we might offer some encouragement to colleagues who are struggling with the kind of frustration we once felt.

We believe that the overwhelming amount of research pointing to the efficacy of the process approach is valid and reliable and must form the core of any approach to teaching composition. Thus, rather than stressing a modes-of-discourse or genre-based series of writing products, we stress a multi-draft process that students must follow each time
they write for us. This is nothing revolutionary, of course; many of us have made this our practice for a long time now. But almost immediately, each of us who does so is faced with a series of critical questions. Given the multi-draft process, can we still grade only the final written products? And if we do grade only the final drafts, what kind of credit do we allow for revision? Do we distinguish good revisions from superficial ones? How much time in a busy schedule can we allow for revision? And how can we make sure that students’ final grades really reflect our belief in the multi-draft process? Most teachers realize that, no matter what we say, students watch what we do, and if what we do is to grade the written products, then it is the products that they will pay attention to—thus undercutting the value of the process. In fact, under the circumstances it is an intelligent choice for students to make, and in our hearts we should truly hope that they will know enough to make the intelligent choice.

So, for many of us the answer to these questions has been to grade our students on their participation in the stages of the process. A variety of methods are available for this kind of grading, but most of them boil down to different systems of rewarding active student participation in prewriting, composing, reviewing with peers, revising, and editing and proofreading (of course these stages go by many different names, and most of us stress their recursive nature as well). For many student populations, this kind of system works very well. In younger, less experienced students, especially, this kind of step-by-step evaluation encourages just what it is supposed to encourage: lots and lots of writing practice, a willingness to take risks, a more open attitude toward what constitutes good writing, and in general an increased ease and fluency with written language. This is highly desirable, and though it usually leads to higher average grades in each writing class, the increase is both encouraging and appropriate.

A problem arises, however, when the writers are a little older, a little more fluent already, a little less likely to be completely free of guile, and a little more resentful of authority and requirements in general. (By the way, these too are all desirable character traits—it’s just that they make the English teacher’s job a little less instantly rewarding.) Under these circumstances, we noticed that more and more students had become adept at working the process, so to speak. Like many English teachers, we became frustrated at what we saw as a mismatch between the progress our students could actually demonstrate and grades they received—in other words, grade inflation.

For us this became intolerable about five years ago, when several of us teachers collapsed in discouraged heaps in the coffee room between classes, and agreed unanimously that, however we tried to tinker with our approaches, our process-based grading systems were awarding B’s to students whose writing shouted “C or D” yet whose ability to accumulate lots of process points was nothing less than a baffling mystery. But the only thing we agreed on was that this had to stop.

We two left that scene with a goal but no plans. Luckily, the plans emerged and developed and finally led us to a place where we can now truly say that our experience is no longer discouraging in any way, let alone in the way it was back then. We think students are getting the grades they earn, and in the process, learning more about improving their writing than ever before. We have found ways to encourage and reward their performance without obliging them to shift their focus in either troublesome direction: neither toward the grades each paper will earn nor toward the process points students can accumulate by fudging on a revision. Both of these unproductive directions were our downfall in the past, so we made them our chief target.

Our biggest breakthrough came as we tried to resolve one of the most intractable issues: how to properly recognize, encourage, and possibly reward the revision phase of the process, while maintaining a clear sense of how good the final revised version of the paper really is. Again and again we had faced the dilemma of evaluating a good, solid paper that had most of its crucial features working successfully but which still fell short of excellent work. This could be called the “B” dilemma. To
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the value of the
process.

require revision on a paper that already bore a B
grade put the student into the difficult position of
wanting to maximize the grade yet not endanger
the solid B he or she had already earned on the
assignment. Students’ logical and intelligent re-
sponse to this situation was generally to revise as
little as possible—especially if the teacher’s com-
ments in the margins were a good indication of
where trouble lay, and where it did not. We in
turn would read the result, a better-than-B paper
on which no genuine revision had been done but
in which the student had diligently “fixed” every-
thing we had flagged as needing work.

The issue for a long time was indeed intract-
able because we believed our various goals were
incompatible. We wished to stress the process ap-
proach by encouraging revision, yet not reward
perfunctory revising. And we were surely not about
to cease commenting in the margins about what
was good and what needed work.

In trying to unknot this problem we suddenly
realized that the goals were incompatible only if
each paper bore a grade. Only if the first version
had a B written on it did the revision seem des-
tined to carry an A no matter what. The very
thought of responding to but not grading the first
version was so exhilarating that we almost imme-
diately carried it further — what if, we asked our-
selves, what if we didn’t grade any of these papers
until the final revised version was in our hands?
What if, instead, after commenting in the margins
in our usual way, we simply noted whether this
paper had successfully shown a high level of per-
formance or needed more revision to demonstrate
such proficiency? Would this satisfy both purposes?

We decided to give it a try. Over the next
couple of semesters we learned additional things
about implementing this kind of grading. What
we were dealing with, we realized, was a system
that had the potential to be self-paced by each stu-
dent. That is, while a few students might be able
to demonstrate proficiency right away — probably
those who would have gotten As in the old sys-
tem — most students would need to revise the pa-
er once, or maybe twice, to achieve that level of
performance. At first glance the trouble with this
concept is that those students with the weakest
skills would quickly fall the farthest behind. But then
we made the next leap: what if the students did
not have to complete all of the assignments? In
other words, would anything crucial be lost if we
structured the course so that the very best writers
might finish every assignment we had devised, but
that the weaker or less experienced writers would
likely complete fewer because they were revising
more often?

The key to implementing this system was the
use of due dates as a structuring strategy rather
than competed assignments. In its present state of
evolution our system has nine due dates in a se-
semester, each coming at the end of a composing
cycle about ten days long. All students prepare
rough drafts, submit them for peer review, and re-
view them in preparation for turning them in to
us. On the due date, every student turns in a pa-
er. But each member of the class may be submit-
ting a different assignment from anyone else, de-
pending on each student’s prior success with ear-
lier papers or earlier due dates. Then when we
read each paper, regardless of the particular assign-
ment the student is working on, we ask ourselves
whether this version represents an adequate dem-
onstration of solving the challenges we meant to
pose with the assignment. If the answer is “yes,”
then for the next due date the student goes on to
the next assignment in the sequence. If the an-
swer is “no, not yet,” then the student will revise
the paper and will not move on to the next assign-
ment until at least the next cycle. Then, we real-
ized, we would not even have to grade the final
revisions. Instead, we would simply let the nine
cycles play out, and issue final course grades based
mostly on how many of the different, complete
assignments students had successfully finished in
that time.

When we realized that what we had was an
individually-paced, performance-based system, it
became clear that we needed to think very care-
fully about the sequence of assignments we were
going to require. After all, it makes little sense to
allow a student to complete only four of a possible
seven papers, for example, if the skills demonstrated
in the sixth and seventh assignments are absolutely
essential for students’ future success. So early on
we had to decide which of the possible skills a stu-
dent might learn during our semester were too
important to miss. For our students, for example —
freshman writers at a state university — the infor-
mation, researched paper represents an assortment of
challenges that is essential for their college success
(besides, it is required in the course description). On
the other hand, a persuading or arguing paper,
though demonstrating an excellent assortment of skills in any event, might not be so crucial for a student’s future work. On this basis we required the researched paper early in the sequence, guaranteeing that every student would get some experience with it. By the same token, the more experienced writers could still benefit from practice in the advanced challenges posed by the persuading assignments late in the sequence.

In an ideal world, of course, all of the possible challenges should be posed to all students. But we face difficult choices daily, and we cannot do everything. An important part of our justification for making this kind of decision is our observation that under this new system our students do better writing and better learning regardless of the grade they end up with. We posed the choice to ourselves in this way: a student can either be required to do seven different kinds of assignments, and possibly achieve only a mediocre performance on each one, thereby getting a C in the course; or a student can work on each assignment until each is a good performance, thereby completing only four or five assignments, and getting a C in that fashion. We concluded—without hesitation—that a C for a few good performances represents more effective learning than a C for many mediocre ones.

The next decision we faced concerned the exact sequence of assignments that we would make. Here it was important to design assignments that we hoped would help students develop their skills gradually, so that when a student had written or revised a fully acceptable paper for one assignment, and we promoted him or her on to the next, we could be sure that each task had appropriately challenged the student and would serve as good preparation for the next. We wanted to begin with narratives because we had had good luck using them with freshman writers in the past. And we wanted to end the sequence with persuading essays, because that would provide adequate challenge even for the most accomplished student writers. This is the sequence that seems to work best for our own context. Other schools and school systems will probably want to adjust the specific assignments to fit their local needs. The important thing seems to be building gradually upon developing skills, and making sure that all students have a fair opportunity to try each of the assignments that the teacher deems essential for a passing grade.

At some point we hit upon the strategy of devising pairs of assignments, with the first of each pair reflecting the personal aspects of a given kind of paper, and the second representing a researched or authoritative version. In this way we were able to gradually introduce students to the use of sources and authorities, and to reinforce for them the importance of beginning with their own ideas before they use outside sources. Otherwise, of course, the danger is that students will piece together a patchwork paper of quotes and paraphrases. Later, after they have fully developed their ideas and learned the limits of their own knowledge, they may profitably go on to support their writing with the work of others. Thus, for the very first assignment, we asked students to retell an old and familiar family story using only their own recollections. The second assignment, which they began only after satisfactorily writing and perhaps revising the first, required them to consult with an older family member—say, a parent or grandparent—and see if the fresh perspective offers any new insights. These two papers represent the narrative pair, one personal and the second somewhat more public. We termed these papers 1A and 1B.

The next stage for our students is an informing pair. The first one, again, is more personal, as students attempt to offer a coherent explanation of some subject for which they have information of their own to offer, especially from their own experience. When they have satisfactorily completed this assignment, the next one sends them to the library to find external sources for the kind of support and further development that enhance good research papers. The assignments in this pair are called 2A and 2B.

At this point, students who have successfully completed all papers and revisions so far have reached the minimum level we consider essential for their future success in college and, therefore, for a decent passing grade in the course—that is, a C. Each instructor or school needs to determine what this minimum level of achievement represents in its particular circumstances. Then, the teacher must arrange the schedule so that students will have a fair chance to achieve a satisfactory per-
formance on that assignment. This system will not work if the designated minimum level cannot be reached by the typical student. Chances are, under such adverse circumstances the teacher would feel somewhat obliged to promote papers that really need more revision. Pretty soon the system would become as self-defeating and discouraging as we described our earlier experience to be.

But with careful planning, this system can be remarkably successful. In our current version, students have nine due dates, or nine paper submission cycles, in which to complete a total of six assignments. After 1A, 1B, 2A, and 2B, the student who writes well enough to go on to the next assignment will write papers for the persuading pair; 3A and 3B, the personal and the researched persuading assignments respectively. To finish all six, and thereby to have a decent shot at an A for the final course grade, students must submit proficient work most of the time. If they revise more than three times during the sequence, they cannot finish all six. We know from our experience that most students will not consistently perform at this high level. It is much more typical that a student will need to revise occasionally, and will finish the course with one or two attempts at 3A, receiving a final course grade somewhere in the B range. Quite a few other students will not get past 2B. But this is what we have allowed for in our scheme—the typical student who puts serious effort into writing and revising will find that this effort earns at least a C, and we are satisfied that this C represents more real learning than the C that would have emerged as an average from a series of mediocre performances under our old system.

The system we are describing is one that is pedagogically sound and not difficult to manage. And, as we have said, it seems to yield grades that fairly represent not only how much the students have worked but also how well they have learned and demonstrated the skills they need to know. But even with these encouraging features we would have difficulty advocating the system if it did not also offer considerable advantages to the students themselves.

Perhaps most important, the system permits students to work at their own pace. Few tasks can be more frustrating for students than taking on new challenges when they have not fully comprehended the old ones. In an individually paced system teachers have no need to force students at either end of the learning curve to behave as though they are in the middle. While this approach is not truly self-paced—because we teachers, not the students, decide which papers are satisfactorily completed—still the effect is that individual students move on to more complex tasks only when they have demonstrated that they are ready.

Related to this point is the fact that this system provides students with a clearer sense of their own progress in learning how to write. Each student can look at the development of any single paper from the first rough draft to the final satisfactory revision and note the progress that changed an unsuccessful paper into a successful one. At the same time, they are reviewing papers of other students at their same level, being directed to look especially hard at certain features of the essay that connect most directly with the assignment goals. These features are likely the ones they have been struggling with themselves, so they benefit from their awareness as both writer and reader. The approach also allows for the possibility of progress for every student, regardless of his or her ability, whether the final course grade is high or low. A fine writer who enters the class will need to demonstrate proficiency at ever-increasing levels of challenges. On the other hand, a student with limited experience or very weak skills will have the opportunity to revise each paper until it successfully demonstrates the skills it was intended to develop. No writer, however unpracticed, need suffer through a series of poor and mediocre performances, never quite understanding how a weak paper becomes a strong one.

The system encourages real revision, as opposed to merely editing for teacher approval or for a marginally higher grade. No grade appears either on the initial drafts or any of the later revisions. When we evaluate a paper that satisfactorily accomplishes the aims of the assignment, the student moves on to the next assignment for the next paper cycle. On the other hand, when we find a paper deficient in one or more areas, we consider whether the student will learn more from a thorough revision, or whether the deficiencies are relatively minor and can be addressed in the next assignment. The latter circumstance is less common but an important one to recognize; demanding revision when only minor issues remain unresolved is like asking for a superficial revision. The more common circumstance, however, is when
we conclude that the student would learn most by revising the paper. And we try to be very clear about what we consider a thorough revision, reminding students that virtually every sentence is a candidate for major change. Of course we occasionally have a student whose “revision” represents an obvious attempt to get by with minimal work. But we always return these with a reminder that a real revision represents real learning—and the student misses that opportunity to advance in the assignment sequence.

Some of the advantages for teachers who use this approach we have already touched on. But there are many more. We are of course excited about the fact that our approach challenges students at every level. Just as the students were frustrated at having to work on assignments that were too easy for them—or too hard for them—we too were not happy knowing that we were forcing everyone toward an average-level assignment. We knew that many students at opposite ends of the writing spectrum were not well served by our old approach.

We also like the way that this new system eases the management of revision assignments and grading. Once we developed the sequence of assignments that was right for our student population, managing the papers was simply a matter of keeping track of due dates. On the fourth due date, for example, Rachel may be submitting 2B; Mike could be turning in a revision of 1B; and Kou may be ready with his first polished version of 2A. In our grade book, the column representing the fourth due date tells us which assignment we will receive from each of them. Our only responsibility during evaluation is to decide whether the paper they each submit does most of what it is supposed to do in a successful way. Any notion of grading, or averaging, or discriminating between a plus and a minus is deferred until the end of the semester. Then we record what each student will work on for the next paper cycle—whether a revision or a new assignment—in the next due-date column.

A benefit we had not expected, but which we welcome now, is the way that this system allows us to handle such nuisances as late papers, incomplete drafts, and so forth. Without having to provide an arbitrary or artificial system of penalties for such annoyances, we can sit back and let the system take care of itself. A student who misses a due date simply misses that due date. The next one will come around in about ten days, and the student loses one opportunity to advance in the sequence, but there is no fuss about it. Indeed the system permits students to miss a due date or two on purpose, if that is what they choose to do, for whatever reason. A few extra due dates have been built into the schedule to allow for several revisions, but this degree of grace can also serve other purposes depending on the students’ needs and circumstances.

We have found that we no longer give grades that are higher than our students’ writing can really support. For us this is mostly because we have gotten away from the reward systems we once considered necessary for carrying out the process-based approach. And we have replaced it with a system of incentives that encourage our students to progress. Now when papers are returned, students eagerly open their folders and, as we would expect, register satisfaction when they get to go on to a new assignment. On the other hand, it has been our experience that students asked to revise are seldom surprised. No rancor; no deep disappointment. They are getting another chance to learn something they need to know, and usually another chance feels better than stopping a project on a low grade. It’s as simple as that. And it feels good to us as well.

This system takes students’ attention away from their grades and keeps it more or less where it belongs, on improving their writing. To be sure, each semester we have a few grade-obsessed individuals who simply cannot get their minds off the mighty A they seem to consider their birthright. But this happens only in three or four cases, and we do our best to ignore their hints and implo ring queries. Indeed these requests mostly furnish us with opportunities to remind the students of how little concern we feel for their grades, though we can honestly acknowledge that we understand how important grades are to students. As soon as we begin talking about what we do feel concerned about, the students are generally pretty happy to drop the subject and return to their seats.

The way we assign the next task, whether it is to revise this assignment or to advance in the sequence, is another important component of the
We sometimes have a student whose "revision" represents an obvious attempt to get by with minimal work. We return these with a reminder that a real revision represents real learning—and the student misses that opportunity to advance in the sequence.

As noted above, all students are interested in their grades, some more than others, and we acknowledge to them that we know this. At the same time we clearly state our own values, articulating our goals for them so that they can see how determined we are that they improve as writers. Some students are uneasy about not getting grades; they seem to "have" to know where they are now or what we might estimate for them in terms of final course grade. This last request is a trap no matter what structure a composition course is built upon. So much of their best writing comes in at the end of the term that it is usually difficult to predict the level of their eventual competence much earlier than that. This is true with our system as well; we cannot do more than guess where any one student will end up in the sequence. But we never refuse to meet with students and discuss their progress.

One phenomenon we have found, however, is that there is occasionally a student who comes into the course with high-level skills but, perhaps because of overconfidence, lacks the discipline to work much on writing. As one might expect, this student will do less with revision opportunities than students who are struggling more. We might guess that composing has always come relatively easily for this student and that he or she has been consistently rewarded with high grades for little effort. While we understand how this history works, we see that it can put an otherwise successful student at risk in our system because we will not reward tinkering and editing as if they were revision. The few students who have not been able to learn this lesson have not fared well in our course. On the other hand, there are also always talented young writers who see the opportunities we put before them and work just as hard as their peers who have much more to learn.

As we have already explained, we have arranged our assignments in a logical sequence based both on movement from personal writing to research-based writing and on increasingly demanding research and rhetorical challenges. Our typical cycle allows students approximately ten days either to work on a new assignment or to revise the one they have been writing. For example, we take in a set of papers on Friday and return them on Tuesday with directions for the student to revise or to begin the process anew for the next paper in the sequence. On the following Friday they bring a draft to class for peer reader response. Then the paper is submitted for evaluation on the following Tuesday, complete with all previous assignments, notes, drafts, and peer responses collected in their folder. On our five-day class schedule, the due dates are always either a Tuesday or Friday.

This tightly-timed and inflexible schedule demands that we evaluate a set of papers almost immediately; we have no more than five days before we return the papers to the students. At times this is a lot of pressure, given other responsibilities, but we make it an important enough priority that we simply do it. The benefits are actually immediately appreciable: for one thing, it is faster to assess each paper in this system; for another, we get
our work done in a timely fashion and the students get their papers back while the work is still freshly in mind, thus enhancing continuity in the course. A more subtle benefit is that by adhering to this schedule ourselves, we model a responsible and involved attitude toward the work of the course. Our students know that we take their work seriously because we respond to it so quickly.

When we collect a set of papers, we typically have a range of assignments to consider, sometimes stretching across four stages of the overall sequence. Aware of the goals of each assignment, we adjust our expectations in order to evaluate fairly each student's work. We must also note that some of the papers are revisions and therefore we need to check them against the earlier papers in order to assess the quality of the revision. As we evaluate we find that these "mini-batches" of papers provide for strong consistency of standards within each grouping and also for some variety as we move from one assignment to another; in other words, we don't get tired of looking at documented writing when we are able to move to personal essays in the same evaluation session.

With this sequential system we are able to see more clearly what each student struggles with; we can address those issues on an individual basis and give that student all the opportunity he or she needs to learn. In fact, we are in a better position to see how each student best learns, some needing to make the same mistake over and over before they comprehend what they must do to avoid future problems, while others might make a beautiful blunder, have a chance to fix it, and then absolutely incorporate the experience as a new or improved skill. As we stated earlier, the self-pacing of the sequence enables both us and our students to see what is happening and why.

For all that we have said here, we are not ready to call this system perfect. Each semester we learn new twists and turns in the writing process, and each semester break finds us revising our own process for the next group of students. But we have found for the first time in a long time a new sense of satisfaction that we are maintaining high standards, encouraging genuine writing improvement, evaluating progress fairly, and having a life besides. We enjoy our composition course more than ever before because we have identified a range of complex goals and achieved them with a great degree of success.

KISSES

Before you
kisses were carnations
brought to me cool from florists' windows
tickling my lips and
left on a vase near my bed
to turn dry and brown.

You
give me tulip kisses
in the garden and the park
sun-warmed opened wide kisses
boldly offering
a taste
of soft black
deep inside.

—Angela Williamson

WAITING FOR WINTER

Before spring's rebirth wrinkles, summer
Gives rain, gives gardens life, covers caked
Earth with water — green leaves sprout
From clay, full-ribbed flowers defy the sun.

Now they die on windowsills, leaves
Browning at outstretched edges, pistils
Withered, pollen long gone — ungrateful
Children cold but full of spring's dreams;
They don't know the winter.

There are only shrouds of grey clouds and
More grey clouds, sunless skies littered
By leaves, dropping like broken angels
From an angry sky to a lonely river, floating
South on forgetful Stygian currents.

The flowers were always thirsty
For the fall, the gardens flourished
So the apples could drop. The ground
Waits to swallow gravity's gifts.
It cannot rain, so it snows.

—Jason E. Hedrington
Welcome to "Multicultural Voices." I am Carolyn G. Majak, immediate past president of Wisconsin Council of Teachers of English and Professor at the University of Wisconsin - Eau Claire. My interests in multicultural literature are both professional and personal. During the past four or five years, I have been writing articles and giving presentations at international, national, regional, state and local conferences on multicultural literature. Since most of my sectionalists have been well-attended, I thought that a regular column on multicultural literature might be useful to language arts and English teachers in Wisconsin. The Executive Board of WCTE agreed and have provided some "seed" money to assist me in this endeavor.

Many elementary, middle level and high school language arts and English teachers language arts in Wisconsin have already taken major strides toward infusing the experiences and contributions of people of color into their curricula. "Multicultural Voices," a new column of the Wisconsin English Journal, will be a regular feature of the Journal, and will appear three times a year. The primary purpose of this column is to assist with the selection of multicultural literature by and about African Americans, American Indians, Latino or Hispanic Americans and Asian and Asian Americans. This column will feature brief annotations or summaries of multicultural literature of a particular genre, theme, author, illustrator and/or age/grade. The literature that will be reviewed in "Multicultural Voices" will be listed in the issue of WCTE Update, immediately preceding its review in the Wisconsin English Journal.

I look forward to sharing this quality literature with language arts/English teachers in Wisconsin. I also welcome your comments about this column, especially about types of literature you would like to have reviewed.

Multicultural Poetry

Poetry is fun.
Poetry can also be quite serious.
Poetry is words and rhythm.
Poetry is about ordinary and extra-ordinary things.
Poetry is to be read aloud.
Poetry is to be enjoyed.
Poetry is about everyone.
Poetry is for everyone.
Poetry: such a good place to begin a column.

These books are a sampling of poetry written mostly by people of color. Some of these books are compilations of poems on a variety of topics, while others are single-topic books. In many of these books the talents of outstanding illustrators and distinguished poets combine to create books that are certain to provide many hours of enjoyment. Although recommended ages are included, teachers are likely to miss some wonderful poetry if these works are not viewed as "age-less" or "grade-less."

Collections of Poetry


If you could only own one or two collections of poetry by African-American poets, Soul Looks Back in Wonder (1993) by Tom Feelings would be one worth purchasing. Tom Feelings has won numerous awards for his illustrations; Soul Looks Back is his first book with color illustration. These wonderful illustrations and the poetic renditions of thirteen authors emphasize "the heritage of strength and endurance, beauty and love, knowledge..."
and creativity" of African-Americans, passed on from one generation to another. Some of the contributors are well-known poets such as Maya Angelou, Lucille Clifton, and Langston Hughes, while other contributors, such as Walter Dean Myers and Margaret Walker, are better known for writing in other genres. A must for English/language arts teachers is the poem "I Love the Look of Words" by Maya Angelou. (Ages 9 and Up)


This collection reflects the happy times and the serious times of African American people. While poetry by Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, Eloise Greenfield, etc. cover themes like playing, pickled pickles, peas and catching fish, some poetry such as, the "Incident" by Countee Cullen, have topics that are more serious. "My People" by Langston Hughes celebrates a people. In keeping with the oral tradition, readers are urged to pass this poetry on. (Ages 5-11)

ISBN 0-02-768440-7

Nye invited poets around the world to submit poetry for this collection. Of those who responded, Nye selected one hundred twenty poets from sixty-eight countries. The book is divided into six major themes: "Words and Silences," "Dreams and Dreamers," "Families," "This Earth and Sky in Which We Live," "Losses," and "Human Mysteries." These poems from around the world demonstrate the many connections that exist across humanity. (All Ages)

ISBN 0-8234-0724-1

Poetry selections in this collection consist of those passed down from the elders as well as those of contemporary poets. They represent poetry from a number of American Indian cultures including the Black Elk, Hopi, Navajo, Crow, and Zuni. (All Ages)

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**Although recommended ages are included, teachers are likely to miss some wonderful poetry if these works are not viewed as “age-less” or “grade-less.”**

ISBN 0-06-021087-7

A delightful combination of poetry and art, *Brown Honey...* begins with the poem "Cherish Me," which includes the line "I am beautiful by design..." This collection rejoices in family, pride, and heritage. Recommended for teachers of African American children. (Ages 5-10)

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**Poetry by a Single Author**


Poetry books by a single author are a handy resource for becoming acquainted with an author’s work. *A Fire in My Hands: A Book of Poems* by Gary Soto contains twenty-three poems based upon the author’s life as a Mexican-American growing up and living in the San Joaquin Valley. In the Foreword, Soto says, “I like to think of my poems as ‘working life,’ by which I mean that my poems are about commonplace, everyday things—baseball, an evening walk, a boyhood friendship, first love, fatherhood, etc.” The vivid images created by Soto’s skillful use of language beckons readers to return to the text again and again. At the end of the book, Soto provides answers to questions he is most frequently asked by children. (Ages 10 and Up)

ISBN 0-8037-0777-0

A collection of poetry about an African-American neighborhood, it includes poems about children, their playmates, and their relationships with their parents. Of particular joy is a poem about how Tony’s mother plays her horn for children when they spend the night. The illustrations of Spivey Gilchrist that accompany several poems about babies are treasures. Other books of poetry by Eloise Greenfield include: (Ages 5-8)


Seven additional poems have been added to this new edition of *The Dream Keeper.* The popular book by distinguished poet Langston Hughes is illustrated by the talented artist Brian Pinkney. Although this new edition comes almost 30 years after Hughes’s death, the poems address topics of historical significance, while also attending to contemporary interests. (Ages 11 and Up)

ISBN 0-06-022917-9
Brown Angels is a pleasant surprise from an author previously recognized for his work as an author of young adult fiction and non-fiction. To accompany his poetry, Myers has compiled turn-of-the-century photographs of African-American children. Myers combines his obvious love for children and their families with poetry to create an interesting and telling story about African-American children. (All Ages)

**Poetry on a Single Theme**

ISBN 0-89239-125-1

Some poetry tells a story. In the epic story, *The People Shall Continue* (first published 1988), Simon Ortiz provides an American Indian perspective on how civilization began and developed. In this poetic account, Ortiz begins with the Creation and traces the history of American Indian people through the struggles they faced before and after the “strange men” arrived and caused considerable destruction. This is a story about treaties and reservations. In the final portion of *The People Shall Continue*, “the concept of the People” is enlarged to include all Peoples now living on this land who have been victims of inhumanity.” (Ages 10 and Up)

ISBN 1-55670-284-4

The title poem, which appeared in *And Still I Rise* (1978) by Maya Angelou, is paired with the equally bold images by Michel Basquiat to create this wonderful picture book. This combination of poetry and art provides an introduction to both a skillful writer and a talented artist. (All Ages)

ISBN 0-399-22141-7

“In many Native American cultures, each of the thirteen moons of the year is said to hold a story of its own.” In *Thirteen Moons*, Bruchac and London share moon stories related to the seasons, which explain relationships between animals, trees and human beings. Native American groups represented include Abenaki, Northern Cheyenne, Potawatomi, Anishinabe, Cree, Huron, Seneca, Pomo, Menominee, Micmac, Cherokee, Winnebago and Lakota Sioux. (All ages)

ISBN 0-688-06822-7

The tone of some Arnold Adoff’s earlier poetry books, such as *All of the Colors of the Race* (1982) and *Black is Brown is Tan* (1973), is considerably more serious than *Chocolate Dreams* (1989). This book is a must for chocolate lovers. Using a variety of poetic forms, Adoff has written many delicious poems. He also has included brief essays about the topic. It appears that both the author and the illustrator have quite an affection for chocolates.

ISBN 1-55670-372-4

This book is an creative endeavor that combines the talents of poet Ntozake Shange with artist Romare Bearden. This simply written text is a celebration of music and those who live and love it. The artwork contributes tremendously to the rhythm of the book. (All Ages)

3) Because so many people were involved in this project, monies were found to replicate all of the reports. Copies are being created for the Lawrence Archives, the Outagamie Historical Society, Riverside Cemetery, and the Appleton Area School District. All the handwritten monologues are being reproduced for use in the city’s elementary schools as are those selected to be video-taped.

**Personal Commentary on the Project**

I was stunned by the success of the venture. Because these students are in the honors English class, I knew I could expect diligent effort and good reports. However, the research and creative investigating they did in unlikely places — records rooms, registries, libraries all over the county — amazed me. Their curiosity overcame any reluctance they may have felt when the project was announced. I have never been more pleased with the efforts of a class to complete an assigned work. They exceeded all expectations. All of us learned a great deal, and I doubt that anyone of these students will ever look at their home town in the same way. There are few corners and buildings in Appleton that are not now more significant because of the research of fifty-four young adults.

I would recommend that anyone with a class of skilled and interested students share Edgar Lee Masters anthology with the objective of creating a marvelous anthology of their own. This could also work very well with teamed social studies and English teachers.