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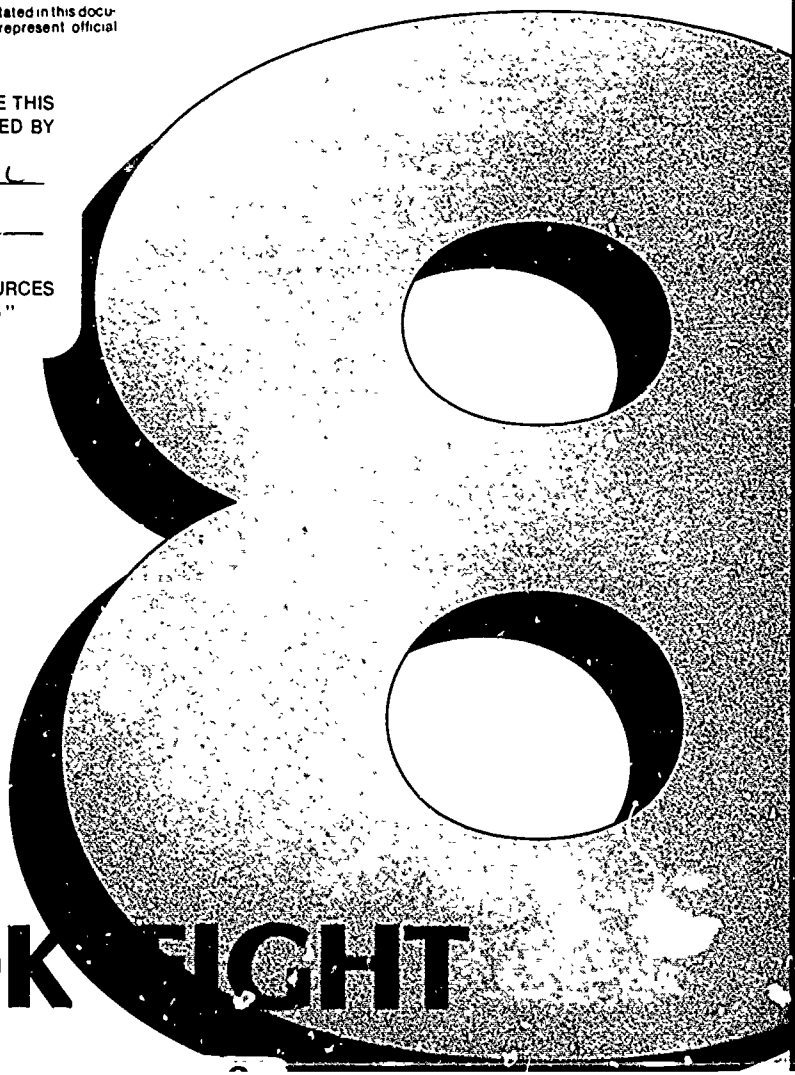
ABSTRACT

Contributed by English teachers across the United States, the activities contained in this booklet are intended to promote the effective teaching of English and the language arts. Teaching strategies offered in the first section of the booklet are designed to stimulate language exploration and include activities where students improvise dialogue and action between two characters, write and arrange readings for three voices, distinguish between fact and inference, work on discussion skills in a structured group discussion, connect concrete images with abstract concepts, and transform original fables into filmstrips. Activities in the second section are designed to stimulate an appreciation and understanding of literature and include focusing on imagist poetry, writing ghost chapters, group role playing, creating the "last words" of famous literary characters, staging a contemporary storytelling contest, and more. Teaching ideas in the third section provide the means for students to learn writing from a variety of different angles and for different purposes. Through this process students become confident, effective writers. Activities include outlining a draft, using Rube Goldberg cartoons as a basis for talking and writing about cause and effect, and practicing descriptive writing by "magnifying the moment." (SR)

IDEAS plus



BOOKLIGHT

IDEAS Plus

A Collection of Practical Teaching Ideas

Book Eight

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Foreword

IDEAS Plus and its quarterly companion *NOTES Plus* are the principal benefits of *NCTE Plus* membership. *IDEAS Plus* is sent out at the end of the summer so that teachers will have it in hand as they begin the school year.

The ideas collected in this eighth edition of *IDEAS Plus* come from two sources: ideas submitted at an Idea Exchange session at an NCTE Annual Convention or Spring Conference, and contributions by readers of *NOTES Plus* and *IDEAS Plus*.

1 Language Exploration

In helping our students to develop their language abilities, we help them to become better communicators and better thinkers. This section on language exploration brings together teaching strategies that challenge and expand students' experience with language and involve them in using clear thinking, imagination, and resourcefulness. In the activities and exercises included here, students improvise dialogue and action between two characters, write and arrange readings for three voices, distinguish between fact and inference, work on discussion skills in a structured group discussion, connect concrete images with abstract concepts, transform original fables into filmstrips, and more.

Turning Exasperation into Success

The first time I used this exercise, I did it out of desperation. My twenty-five average-track juniors could *not* recognize run-ons and fragments in their own writing. So, one day I put randomly selected topics (straight out of Webster's) at the top of twenty-five blank sheets of paper, pulled students' desks into a circle, and distributed the sheets. The directions were minimal: write a complete, legible sentence on the topic above, initial it, and pass the paper to the person on your right. Next, proofread the sentence written by your neighbor, make necessary corrections, and then write a sentence of your own before passing the paper on to the next person. Each person was responsible for *all* the sentences preceding his or her own.

Success! At the end of the class hour, I had 625 sentences, and only one was a fragment! Furthermore, this had been a relatively painless way to attack a problem; the atmosphere of the class had been relaxed, chatting had been purposeful, and the end results had been rewarding. It was cooperative learning at its best.

I have since expanded this lesson in many ways; for example, I might ask the students to include a participial phrase, a gerund, or an indirect

object in the sentences; or I might use vocabulary words or literary terms as the topics—the possibilities are endless.

This exercise can also be used as a review for a literature unit or novel. The topics at the top of the sheets can be characters, places, or key ideas; each student must write a sentence about the topic, and there can be no duplication of ideas. Later these lists can be posted about the room for a day or two before an exam. The exam might even be based in part on the student-generated lists.

Janice F. Bengston, Urbana High School, Urbana, Illinois

Three Writers Writing—Three Readers Reading

An exercise which students in developmental reading and writing courses especially like is based on a poem entitled "Love Song No. 23" by Bruce Andrews. This poem can be found in *None of the Above: New Poets of the USA* (Ed. Michael Lally, Crossing Press, 1976, pp. 29–31). This activity combines role-playing with collaborative writing and demonstrates point of view, character development, dialogue, and plot structure.

The student instructions for the two stages, writing and reading, can be broken down as follows:

Writing

1. Students form groups of three. Each group selects a magazine photo of a person.
2. Each student in the group has a different role. Each will write five sentences, following certain guidelines.
3. One student, student "A," writes as the character in the photo. "A" will explain why he or she had to do something in the recent past or the present: for example, "I had to get away fast!" or "I just have to get away!"
4. Student "B" writes as "A's" mother, father, child, lover, or best friend. "B" explains "A" by providing some details about his or her past, childhood, or current qualities, or by providing a personal anecdote about "A."
5. Student "C" writes as the omniscient narrator, talking about "A" as from a distance, in the future. "C" may reflect town gossip and provide hindsight needed to make a point about what "A" did, or

perhaps what "B" says about "A"; for example, "Little did the town of Smithville know that. . . ."

6. When students have finished the writing, they follow the instructions for reading.

Reading

1. This reading is for voices "A," "B," and "C."
2. The readers will stand or sit in a triangle.
3. The reading is to last three minutes or less. The readers may say their five phrases anytime during this period, and all three must finish within the time allotted. Readers may, if they wish, stop before the time is up.
4. Readers may read consecutively, all together, backwards, or may repeat any line or lines they choose.
5. Groups may choose to have an audience for their reading, or they may read only for themselves.
6. After class, students write journal entries in which they freely appraise what they experienced while writing and reading and afterward. They also explain how the experiences affected the members of their group.

This activity has been stimulating for my students. After volunteer groups have performed their readings, students in the audience often applaud spontaneously and are eager to discuss the assignment and its results. Our discussion often includes sophisticated but at first unlabeled ideas, such as character credibility, drama, and the effect of audience. Subsequent journal entries expand the discussion and reveal a heightened sense of the classroom as a language community.

Sandra G. Brown, Ocean County College, Toms River, New Jersey

Expanding a Metaphor

Student writers need practice in selecting and manipulating words to achieve specific purposes. They can also use help in understanding figurative language. This group exercise accommodates both goals. Here it is in a nutshell: students apply the vocabulary from one academic discipline to write about another entirely separate idea. In the process, they choose and arrange words to create a consistent metaphor.

The directions to students are as follows: working in your group, choose an academic area and list all the specialized vocabulary words pertinent to that subject. Then, using as many of those words as possible, write about a different subject.

Here's a sample of what my students accomplished:

Errata

> I was walking down the street when I noticed a crowd surrounding a run-on sentence. There was a prepositional phrase, twisted and warped, trapped in the middle of this ghastly mess. The verb had been severed from its intended subject, a horror beyond description. The editor was on the way. I kept walking.
>
> —Robin, Terry, Danny, Veronica, Kathrine

Judith W. Cobb, Independence High School, Charlotte, North Carolina

Snapshot Alliteration

Have you ever wished you had the creativity of Shel Silverstein, or even the cleverness of that English teacher down the hall? Do you sometimes like to use a silly idea to get things rolling? And do you need a good idea for an assignment that 99 percent of your students will complete *willingly*? Here it is--my version of a terrific way to use personal snapshots.

My main motivation for using these activities is to demonstrate to my students the wonderful ways language can be manipulated, as well as how much fun it is to create new words to fit given situations. Also instructional is the use of the thesaurus, the practice of sentence combining, the demonstration of a good way to "show, not tell" when writing descriptions, and above all, the development of personal confidence with one's own creativity.

Alliteration Activities

(Note: All students will need a personal snapshot for activity No. 7.)

1. Play a few of the poems from the cassette tape available with Shel Silverstein's *A Light in the Attic* (Harper and Row, 1981) or *Where the Sidewalk Ends* (Harper and Row, 1974). Choose several selections that contain alliteration. I used "Warning," "Invitation," "Eighteen Flavors," "The One Who Stayed," "Thumbs," "Sarah

Cynthia Sylvia Stout Would Not Take the Garbage Out," "With His Mouth Full of Food," and "Picture Puzzle Piece." These poems are used to loosen the students up and get them ready for the next step of the activity.

2. Challenge a volunteer to repeat "Peter Piper" as fast as he or she can. Any other students who wish may also participate. At this point, the students consider these types of poems tongue twisters. Don't mention the *real* point of the lesson yet. Let students enjoy what you're doing.
3. Divide the class into groups of three. Pass out a different tongue twister to each group. Give students two minutes to practice saying the twister in unison. Each group then says the twister together in front of the class. If students are really into it, allow each group to choose the best speaker and then conduct a competition for the Tongue Twister Award. A small award may be given to the group with the winning "fast mouth."
4. Now is the time to talk about the silliness of the twisters and what makes them so funny to hear and fun to repeat. Emphasize the term "alliteration" and what it means. Pass out copies of some of the Silverstein poems that were read earlier and allow the students to find the alliterative words in them. Since the students now know the reason for using the poems, play the taped versions again so that they can follow along with the words. Point out Silverstein's use of nonsense words.
5. Now you're ready to get the students involved in writing alliteratively. I complete this assignment on three different levels—large group, small group, and individual. First, conduct the large group activity. Choose an animal, any common or uncommon animal, and have the students create a statement or poem about that animal while you or a scribe write it on the board. The majority of the words about the animal must contain alliteration.
6. Next is the small group activity, with your students still in the same groups of three. Display pictures, show slides, or allow the students to focus on anything in the room that the group can use to construct an alliterative description. Decide on a minimum number of words, and challenge students to include at least that many in their description. Each group reads its final creation in front of

the class. (When I used this activity, I obtained advertising posters from a local convenience store as possible subjects. I also allowed students to use the thesaurus if they wanted.)

7. For the individual assignment, each student needs to have a photograph, a picture that hopefully has some personal meaning. Each student is asked to focus on one element within the photograph, or to view the picture as a whole and to write a description of that element or picture, using alliteration. Students need construction paper, tape, glue, and marking pens.

   When the class is finished, or when the assignment is due, students stand in front of the class and read their descriptions and tell what they are focusing on in the photograph. We then discuss any other words that could have been used for each person's creation, and time is allowed for revision.

Finally, I staple all the Snapshot Alliteration assignments on the wall. Once the word gets around the school, my room becomes Grand Central Station!

Penny Gessel, Lakeridge Junior High School, Orem, Utah

Heating Up Discussion with an Inner Circle

This is a prewriting exercise for a persuasive writing assignment. This exercise gets the students involved and makes them *want* to express their opinions. I find it also helps the students learn to address the opposition in their writings. I was introduced to this idea in a "Newspaper in Education" workshop organized by the *St. Joseph Gazette*.

The day before the writing is to take place, we have an organized class discussion. Students are told to draw a line vertically down the center of a sheet of paper. On one side, they are to write "Pro"; on the other side, "Con." After arranging four chairs all facing in, and the rest of the chairs in a circle around them facing in, I give these instructions: "Only the four people sitting in the inner chairs can express their opinion, but everyone must take turns sitting in one of those chairs at least once during the class time. To take your place in a chair when all of the seats are occupied, you must stand behind one of the chairs. As one of the inner circle, you must get up after you've expressed your opinion if someone is behind your chair, but you may go stand behind someone else's chair if you want.

Everyone is to come up with a list of pros and cons on the issue we are discussing, based on the discussion they heard while sitting in the outside circle."

I then present either an editorial that I have found on a controversial issue or a controversial issue of my own that is of interest to the students. The key is to pick a discussion topic that the students feel strongly about. I also take part in the discussion when necessary, playing devil's advocate.

Students usually get involved to the point that they want to join the inner circle. Often they have a hard time not saying anything in response to comments when they are in the outer circle. I remind them, when necessary, that the only way to talk is to be in one of the inner four chairs.

The next day, after students review the pros and cons from their lists, and after we go over the writing procedure for a persuasive paper as a class, the students begin their own papers. On the heels of the heated discussion from the previous day, the students are eager to write; that impetus makes it easier for students to come up with convincing arguments. After the circle discussion, students aren't just writing—they are writing with feeling!

Sue Hendren, North Harrison High School, Eagleville, Missouri

Improvised Drama

Several summers ago playwright David Schein and I devised this exercise as we were team-teaching Schein's improvisational theater workshop at the Governor's Institute on the Arts, Castleton, Vermont. This activity will keep everyone in the class writing at full speed, except for the two students who are improvising the dialogue and action.

First, the class brainstorms a list of characters. (You'll need to solicit more suggestions than there are students in your class.) Write the suggestions on the chalkboard. Once you have plenty, write each one on a scrap of paper. Possibilities: old man with a broken leg; mother with newborn; marine recruit; bum; female brain surgeon; concert pianist about to perform.

Drop these scraps of paper into a hat and have each class member draw one. Then pair up students quickly and randomly.

Two paired students at a time improvise dialogue and action; encourage student actors to match dialogue, body language, and actions to

their character. The rest of the class is divided into thirds, everyone with pencil and paper.

The students in group one are stenographers. They write as fast as they can to keep up with the dialogue that unfolds, using abbreviations, messy writing, anything to keep up with the actors' words. A more sophisticated system might rotate the stenographers so that they are not all trying to keep up with the *whole* play that is developing. They could take turns capturing the dialogue (taking alternate sentences or alternate characters).

The students in group two are choreographers/directors. They write down every gesture and facial expression made by the actors.

The students in group three are critics. They report what happened and how it could have been improved, much as a professional critic would review a production on Broadway. (It might be useful to have the students read a few pieces of criticism ahead of time and consider parody of the form as their response to this assignment.)

Have the students read their "versions" of what happened, and for improvisations for which there is no general enthusiasm, consider creating a formal script and rehearsing it.

General tips: Limit the improvisations to five minutes or less. Rotate the chores so that the stenographers of group one become the choreographers, then the critics, and so on, until each student participates in all three writing activities.

Geof Hewitt, Vermont Department of Education, Montpelier, Vermont, and David Schien, Piermont, New York

At the Sound of the Beep

During each grading period, I like to change the pace with at least one assignment that's a bit out of the ordinary. Projects I've tried include one

in which students create newspapers from the 11th century and another in which they adapt scenes from literature for videotaping. "At the Sound of the Beep" is the latest untraditional idea I've found useful. It's mostly for fun, but it also has some benefits in terms of practicing concise communication.

I owe this idea to my own two teenagers, who are answering-machine experts, and who change phone messages according to the season, the month, or even the week. I became intrigued by their creativity, their "thematic" approach, and the conventions they observed in creating their messages. I began to think of ways I could use this same idea to prompt originality in my classroom.

For this assignment, students are asked to create a brief message on tape, as if for an answering machine, that captures the essence of a literary character. This assignment works best in the fourth marking period, because students have a wider variety of characters from which to choose. I base my grade on originality; quality of content; and proper diction, word choice, and enunciation.

Here are the instructions I give students:

> Create an answering-machine message as the main character from a piece of literature of your choice. Select three characters from the same work, and create and tape the messages that they would leave "at the sound of the beep."

Students are asked to turn in both the tape and the script they created. Students particularly enjoy listening to the finished results and deciding how well their classmates captured the essence of each character.

Jean M. Kenny, Pascack Hills High School, Montvale, New Jersey

Fact and Inference in the News

An examination of several news accounts of the same story can be quite illuminating for students. They may learn not only to distinguish between fact and inference but to read more critically and to take into account a writer's possible bias.

First, ask students to find three accounts of the same incident. The local newspaper, a television news program, and a national news magazine such as *Time* or *Newsweek* are possible sources for three differing views. Have students make a chart of those "facts" that all three

reports agree on, and on the areas of disagreement. For example, one account may imply that foul play was involved and the others may not. You might also ask students to consider what inferences they can draw after reading all three accounts.

In addition, you may want your students to look at one of the tabloid accounts of the same story. This will provide an opportunity to spin off into a discussion of responsible journalism versus sensationalism.

Finally, after class discussion of the various versions of the story, ask students to write their own accounts of the incident, using only the information which can be documented and which is not inferential.

When I conducted this activity recently in one of my classes, using the story of Nelson Mandela's release from a South African prison, students learned a lot about the difference between fact and inference, and also gained insight into the way news is reported.

After students had examined and discussed different versions of the story, they listed the following as facts: President Bush called Nelson Mandela; Bush invited Mandela to the White House; Bush said he was willing to work for a "racially free South Africa, a society without prejudice."

As we continued our discussion, students noted that news stories about the same event tend to agree on a few basic facts, but that they use different language and make different inferences. In this case, the stories had even used different quotes: "a society that knows freedom" and "a society of total freedom," and students wondered aloud which quote was correct. Students also noticed that different reports quote different people—one of the stories they read quoted a local congressman and the other quoted an unidentified source. In one case a story reported a conversation but didn't give a source.

In discussing responsible journalism, students looked for loaded words and omissions in the stories, and questioned the credibility of sources quoted (such as "some congressional and administrative officials"). One story that students examined reported that Bush "declined to say"; another story reported that "the topic had not been discussed." Students agreed that the first story made it sound "as if he's holding something back or hiding something."

Students' overall impression was that "you have to be a bit skeptical." They discovered that national stories "aren't that different because a lot of it comes from the wire services." One student said, "I didn't realize

the local papers were so much alike on national news. The biggest difference is where they put the piece."

When it came time for students to write their noninferential statements, most students wrote something like this: "President George Bush telephoned Nelson Mandela from the White House on Sunday. During this conversation Bush invited Mandela to the White House for talks. Bush reported he was willing to work for a racially free South Africa, a society without prejudice."

Along with a bit of healthy skepticism, students seemed to gain more confidence in their ability to read, hear, and evaluate major news stories.

Fredna Carlson Scroggins, St. Louis Community College at Meramac, St. Louis, Missouri

Codes in the English Classroom

For the middle school student, what could be considered more real-world writing than communicating with each other in terms totally incomprehensible to others? Slang, innuendo, body language, guttural utterances, and nonsense words make up effective communication for teens. These forms of communication enjoy the added advantages of keeping adults on the outside looking in—and guessing. One of the most effective lessons I have ever initiated with my classes involves teacher-sanctioned note writing—in code.

My students generally respond with knowing nods when we discuss the life and times of Edgar Allan Poe. Since they are already in touch with his life-style, we can usually slide right into some of his easier works. "The Gold Bug" is always a favorite short story. Some classes read an adapted version, and my lower-level students may read the story in play form.

Of course, many students are most interested in the main character's expertise as a cryptographer. After discussing Legrand's code-breaking technique, we further investigate other, more sophisticated code methods. Students study secret writing forms of ancient Greek society, famous code patterns of World War II, and modern, computer-enhanced coding. We experiment with types of secret inks, code wheels and scrolls, and other coding devices. Students marvel at the intricacies of coding, and they respect Legrand's ability to break Captain Kidd's unpunctuated, coded message. Since Legrand could reach Kidd's treasure only by

breaking the code and organizing the run-together words correctly, this discussion may help students appreciate the relevancy of punctuation to communication.

I also introduce a few simpler coding systems. Julius Caesar originated one code system that many students enjoy using. His letter-substitution method consisted of writing the alphabet from left to right, and then beneath that, writing the alphabet again but shifting the beginning by three letters, as follows:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z A B C

Caesar is said to have shifted three letters, but students may specify any number of letters to shift, share the secret with a friend who will receive the message, and then write the note. For example, if the letters are shifted by five, the code key will look like this:

A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z A B C D E

If the student writes, "Do you still like Ray? I know you do!", the code message will read:

I T D T Z X Y N Q Q Q N P J WF D N P S T B D T Z I T

Vertical writing offers students a simple coding technique to use for their notes. "Ask your mom if you can go to the show Friday," can be written like this:

A M U O W
S O C T F
K M A H R
Y I N E I
O F G S D
U Y O H A
R O T O Y

By reading down the columns, the receiver can decode the message. Vertical writing may be made more difficult if the reader must read from the right column to the left column or skip from column to column. If the message does not fill the rectangular configuration, "null letters" may be used at the end of the message, or students may agree to designate certain letters as "filler." Filler letters can also make the decoding task more difficult.

After our coding research, I instruct students to write a coded message to someone they know in one of my other classes. The novice cryp-

tologists post their notes on bulletin boards around the room. Some messages require that the sender and receiver possess a code key, and these keys must be exchanged between classes.

Though the notes are written to a specific person, other students naturally try to break the codes and read each other's notes. After I give the classes a chance to spend time at the bulletin boards working on decoding, authors of the notes begin to "plug in" a few code characters so that others have a better chance of breaking their codes. Even when a code is broken, the message is to remain a secret so that other students still have the fun of working on the solution. The student who has created the most difficult code is always a hero, and my lower-level students take particular delight in stumping members of my advanced classes.

Students usually enjoy learning about codes; they begin to appreciate the importance of punctuation and precise word choice to communication, and many find interesting reasons to write. Students employ thinking skills as they write their notes, and have fun working with their peers to solve the codes. I find that Poe has given me a wealth of ideas for launching a variety of language arts activities.

Sherron Mayfield, McAllister Junior High School, Bay City, Texas

Corresponding with Students about Their Work

Giving students the opportunity to question the teacher's evaluation of a test or paper may sound risky, but in some cases it can actually reduce the stress for both student and teacher.

When tests and papers are returned, I spend some time going over them. Then I ask the students who have questions or comments about their answers, scores, or whatever concerns them, to take a sheet of paper, staple it to the front of the test or paper, and write their comments. If students disagree with the correct answer or with my evaluation, they are asked to write a defense of their answer or of their work.

On some occasions, I have made mistakes in calculating a grade, and this is a time for the student to point out any such mistake and have an adjustment made. Students may have other concerns as well, and this activity helps them to feel that their concerns are being heard.

One of the most valuable benefits of this method is that students are required to think more critically about their answers and about my comments. Often, as students rethink their answers and try to defend

them, they come to see the fallacy or weakness themselves. Of course, sometimes the reverse occurs. On occasion, a student's defense has made me understand more clearly that student's position, prompting me to change my evaluation.

After reviewing the comments, I respond to students' specific concerns on the same sheet. Each student who writes to me receives a reply. If I find that a conference is necessary, I ask the student for an appointment.

By using this method of corresponding with students about their work, I accomplish four things: I am able to deal with rational rather than emotional responses from disappointed students; I encourage and reinforce critical thinking; I create a written record to remind me to change grades in my grade book if the reevaluation warrants my doing so; and I send the message to my students that I care about them and want to hear what they have to say.

Lynn W. Raviv, Mountain Brook High School, Birmingham, Alabama

A Strategy for Small-Group Discussion

Does this scenario sound familiar? You set up a small-group discussion in the classroom, hoping to get everyone involved; instead, the most verbal students dominate the group, while the quieter students, who need practice sharing their views at least as much as the others, have neither the opportunity nor, apparently, the inclination to speak up.

To remedy this situation in my own classroom, I set up some guidelines that ensure that a small-group discussion is just that—a group discussion. (The seed for these guidelines was planted in my mind by an article whose source I have long since forgotten.) This method is highly structured, but provides one way of dealing with the problem of involving both active and reticent students in a group discussion. The guidelines work for a variety of assignments, and can be effective with students from a wide range of ages and abilities:

1. The assignment itself is divided into at least as many parts as there are group members.
2. When a part of the assignment is discussed, there is only one speaker; the rest are listeners.
3. The speaker says all he or she cares to regarding the assignment,

and only then may the listeners speak. Those who were listeners make comments expressing agreement or disagreement and explaining their reasoning.

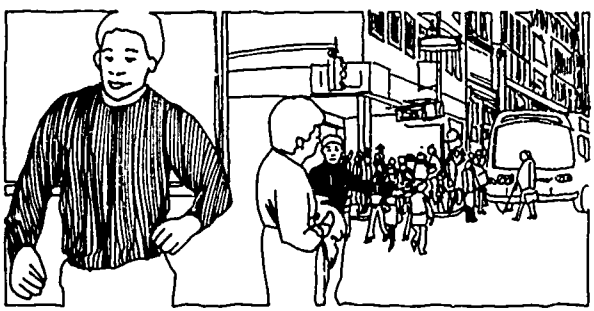
4. The group then comes to a consensus on the idea.
5. The group work continues with another student assuming the role of speaker. This rotation continues until the assignment is complete.

I have found this strategy to be a successful way to break the pattern of unequal participation that sometimes develops in open-group discussions. Using this discussion format once or twice may help accustom quiet students to sharing their views, and may sensitize more confident students to the value of listening to the opinions of others.

Sylvia Slack, McGavock Comprehensive High School, Nashville, Tennessee

Reporting on Good Deeds

The month of December can be a notoriously unproductive time of the year for high school students. The excitement of the holidays, interspersed with the usual laxity of teacher requirements, serves to produce an atmosphere of general dysfunction. However, as there is usually a minimum of fifteen teaching days during this festive month, I decided that I needed to create an activity which was both appropriate to the season and faithful to the curriculum.



On the first day of school following Thanksgiving, I told my students that over the next two weeks they were to do something for someone else. They were to spend no money in this endeavor, nor were they to take any money for the service that they rendered. Some possible activities that we brainstormed included baby-sitting, raking leaves, and

washing dishes. Another stipulation was that they never share the reason for their "good deed" with the recipient or anyone else. At the end of two weeks students were to come to class prepared to write about the experience.

After the two-week period, each student reported on what he or she had done and on the reaction of the recipient. Many students appreciated the request for secrecy; they understood the purpose of doing a good deed without expecting anything back, not even praise or gratitude. But other students were frustrated that they couldn't explain their actions. Some confessed that their parents were convinced that their actions had an ulterior motive. Several months later, some students were still begging for permission to reveal their purpose to the recipient!

As a follow-up, we read O. Henry's "Gift of the Magi." As a result of this activity, I felt that I had helped my students gain a deeper understanding of the concept of selfless giving.

Ann Wilson, Buena Vista College, Storm Lake, Iowa

Nursery Rhymes with an Intellectual Flavor

An activity my middle school students have enjoyed for years combines memorable nursery rhymes with an introduction to, or a review of, the thesaurus. This playful activity gives students practice using the thesaurus in a comfortable, fun setting.

Initially I discuss the thesaurus in general with my class and distribute a copy to everyone. (If I have less than a classroom set, I scatter the copies so that students can share.) We analyze ways in which the thesaurus compares with the dictionary and ways in which the two resources differ. I ask students to look up a past-tense verb, to demonstrate the fact that only present-tense verbs are listed, and I explain that not all parts of speech are found in the thesaurus.

Next, I divide the class into groups of two or three. (Each group should have its own thesaurus.) The group selects a nursery rhyme and chooses a secretary to record its version of the poem. Usually I bring several books of nursery rhymes to class on this day, since some students have never heard the rhymes and others cannot remember all of the words. Each group then substitutes synonyms from the thesaurus for words and phrases in the original rhyme.

After the students have rewritten their poems, each group reads its

rhyme to the entire class. If two groups have chosen the same rhyme, the class members can discuss which version they prefer, and why; we can then discuss choices of adjectives and the criteria that may determine those choices. Here is a before-and-after example of the nursery rhyme "Jack and Jill":

Original Version

Jack and Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water;
Jack fell down and broke his crown,
And Jill came tumbling after.

Revised Version

Jack and Jill ascended the hummock
To bear a hod of H_2O;
Jack stumbled and fractured his crest,
And Jill ensued sprawling subsequently.

The students enjoy writing and sharing their original versions, as well as listening to their classmates' versions. In the meantime, they develop an appreciation for a resource that will be useful to them in the future.

Nancy Dunn, Alief Middle School, Houston, Texas

Metaphor Medley

I've found a way to help students see comparisons between abstract ideas and concrete experiences. In this writing activity, each student chooses a word for an emotion or concept. Possible words might include love, anger, freedom, happiness, friendship, hatred, patriotism, and jealousy. By following a series of steps, students write detailed metaphors illustrating the terms.

I have designed this lesson to last approximately one week. Students have given me positive feedback on the activity. Even reluctant writers are able to follow the steps and are eager to share their compositions.

The lesson begins with a prewriting technique known as free-word association. Each student completes a handout consisting of fifteen categories. At the top of the page, the student writes the concept he or she wishes to address. The student then free-associates a word related to that concept for each item on the list. The categories chosen are designed

to evoke sensory images from the student's experience or imagination. The teacher may omit or add items to the following list:

color—
shape—
texture—
object—
smell—
taste—
sound—
place—
building—
article of clothing—
music/song—
movie—
book/story/poem—
vehicle—

Modeling the word-association technique on a sample concept will help guide the students through the exercise. Demonstrating a question format for students will also contribute to a workable list. For example, you might ask students, "If love were a color, what would it be?" Students' associations will vary depending on their experiences, so their answers are likely to vary as well.

At the end of this stage, each student will have a completed list of words and phrases associated with the concept chosen. Below are two examples of completed lists:

Jealousy

color: green
shape: heart
texture: crushed glass
object: a ring returned
smell: cheap perfume
taste: bitter
food: lemon
sound: laughter
place: the mall
building: school
article of clothing: a miniskirt
music/song: "You've Lost That Lovin' Feelin'"
movie: *Fatal Attraction*
book/story: *Othello*
vehicle: a Chevy truck

Happiness

color: green
shape: triangle
texture: canvas
object: a canoe
smell: wildflowers
taste: cool, fresh water
sound: a nearby stream
place: park
building: tent
article of clothing: a warm sweatshirt
music/song: "Rocky Mountain High"
TV show: *Nature*
book/story/poem: "I wandered lonely as a cloud" (Wordsworth)
vehicle: four-wheel-drive truck

The second step of the lesson requires each student to construct five sentences from the words and phrases on his or her list, using the concept as a sentence stub. Below are two student sentences based on the word *jeclousy*:

> Jealousy is the pearl ring my girlfriend returned to me as she stepped into a Chevy truck driven by the one who has taken my place.
>
> Jealousy is listening to "You've Lost That Loving Feeling," as the memory of her laughter rings in my ear.

Another student related the concept of happiness to camping:

> Happiness is riding in a black four-wheel-drive Ford truck with the windows rolled down, and smelling the aroma of wildflowers as you hear the rushing of water in a nearby stream.

Once the students have created their sentences, they develop descriptive narrative compositions using the metaphors as topic sentences. Adding details, relating a personal experience, and explaining why the comparison was made are all popular ways to expand the sentence into a paragraph or essay. Students may then illustrate their work and prepare to share their work with others.

On "Metaphor Medley Day," a special time is set aside for sharing compositions. My students' presentations have included reading to music, sharing snacks with the audience, and even spraying the classroom with flowery air fresheners to enhance the atmosphere.

This assignment can be used as an enrichment activity to supplement a longer unit on figurative language or as a preliminary lesson to a unit on poetry or symbolism. I notice such benefits as an improved use of descriptive phrases and much more attention to detail by the students in their own writing.

DaLee Garcia, La Joya Independent School District, La Joya, Texas

Create Your Own Filmstrip

As an English teacher, I am constantly seeking new ways to motivate my students, and I have found that making filmstrips is a motivating activity for restless high school students. In this activity, students create and present a filmstrip version of a story they have written as a group. The purpose of this assignment is to write and illustrate stories to convey a

message to an audience. My freshmen and seniors love this activity and. throughout the rest of the year, ask when they can make another filmstrip.

I came across the original version of this idea in a workshop conducted by Dale Young of Texas Christian University; it was intended for use in an elementary classroom, but I have modified it for use with high school students. I follow this simple procedure:

1. I read aloud several selections from *Aesop's Fables* to model stories with a moral.
2. As a class, we talk about fables and their special characteristics. We draw examples from the fables I read aloud and from others students have read.
3. Students form groups of four; each group is to work together to write an original fable. Members of the group brainstorm ideas; they may create a moral of their own or may use a moral from a fable they know. Each group drafts its fable and revises. When the group members are happy with the fable, they turn it in to me.
4. Students choose responsibilities:
   Group leader—keeps group on task, fills in if someone is absent, and makes sure the filmstrip is complete for the final presentation.
   Storyboard writer—breaks story into eight to twelve frames, and copies it onto storyboards.
   Artist—draws appropriate pictures on the storyboard and then on the filmstrip.
   Narrator—brings appropriate background music and narrates story to the class during the final presentation.
5. All the group members have input on how to break the

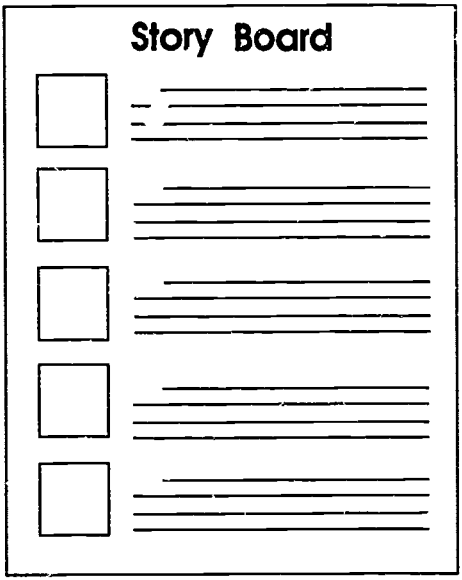


Figure 1

fable into eight to twelve frames. The storyboard writer recopies it onto a storyboard (Figure 1).

6. The group decides on appropriate pictures for each frame, and the artist draws them on the storyboard.
7. The narrator reads the framed story to the group, and the students work on necessary revisions for coherence and transition and decide on background music.
8. The artist redraws pictures on filmstrip using a film guide (Figure 2), washable transparency pens, and an 18" strip of clear 35-mm film.
9. Students have twenty minutes on the day of the presentation for final touches.

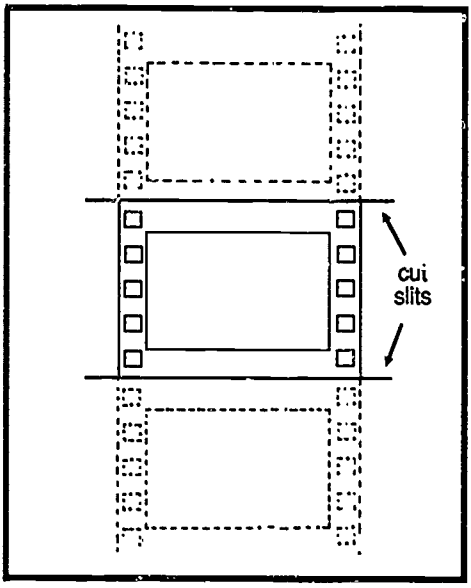


Figure 2: Film Guide (mounted on a 5" x 8" card)

Directions: Thread film from back of card through bottom slit. Hold roll of film flush against card. Pull film through top slit and to top of card, to allow for some lead film. Draw only in box; do not draw over lines. After allowing frame to dry, advance until you can no longer see picture, and draw next frame.

10. Each group presents its filmstrip, and we spend five minutes after each presentation talking about how the group arrived at the finished product.
11. I grade each presentation in class using self-, peer, and teacher evaluations. (I don't end up taking any papers home to grade!)

I know of three possible sources for clear filmstrip: blank lead film can be ordered through the library audio-visuals catalog; outdated or damaged filmstrips can be bleached in a mixture of one-third Clorox to

two-thirds water; and processed 35-mm film can be obtained from the journalism department, and then bleached.

This activity is obviously motivational but has many other educational benefits as well. Auditory, visual, and tactile kinesthetic learning styles are all accommodated; weak writers successfully participate in composing a story; students sequence stories with a beginning, a middle, and an end; and group members must work together cooperatively. Most importantly, students interact not only by sharing their filmstrips and explaining how they were created, but also by enthusiastically watching other presentations and asking questions about them.

Donna Thorshov, Elsik High School, Alief, Texas

What Did We Do Yesterday?

Providing make-up work for students can be an aggravation. I learned an easy method when I was a student teacher.

At the beginning of each six weeks, all students receive a calendar, a duplicated sheet of paper with fifteen squares printed on front and back. This provides a square for each day of the six weeks. These calendars are kept in the front of each student's notebook.

I write every day's assignment on the chalkboard. At the beginning of each class period, students copy the assignment onto their calendars.

A laminated sheet of poster board, with thirty squares drawn on it, hangs next to the chalkboard. Every afternoon, I use a water-soluble, audiovisual pen to copy that day's work into the appropriate square of the big calendar. I then erase the chalkboard and write up the next day's work.

On a table beside the calendar sits a wire rack. It holds file folders which are numbered in sequence. Every activity the students do in class is numbered sequentially. So if the fourteenth thing we do during a six-week period is freewriting, I put extra copies of that assignment in file folder fourteen.

Students who have been absent go directly to the big calendar. Onto their personal calendars they copy the assignments that they missed. If they missed doing freewriting fourteen, for example, they pull a copy of it from file folder fourteen, and do it as homework.

The only papers which do not go into file folders are tests. Those stay

in a folder at my desk. It is the student's responsibility to arrange a time to take a missed test.

This system has several benefits. Students use the first minute of class to write on their calendars while I check roll. Students never ask me, "What are we going to do today?" Instead, they find out on their own. I never have to rummage for make-up work or rack my brain for an answer to the question, "What did we do yesterday?" And since I write on the laminated calendar with a water-soluble pen, at the end of each six weeks it is an easy matter to wash the calendar off and start afresh.

Marylou Guentert, Brenham High School, Brenham, Texas

2 Literature

Literature has the potential to enrich our dreams, to deepen our understanding of human experience, and to help us evaluate our own strongest emotions and experiences. Naturally, as teachers, we want to help our students find in literature everything that it offers. The teaching strategies in this section provide a variety of approaches to literature, including focusing on imagist poetry, writing ghost chapters, group role playing, creating the "last words" of famous literary characters, staging a contemporary storytelling contest, and more.

Collaborating to Explore Characterization

In this activity, students bring together characters from different works of literature in contemporary settings and perform hypothetical encounters for the class. Students in the audience write journal entries about each presentation, and then decide on the best individual presentation and best pair presentation. This activity fosters a deeper understanding of fictional characters, and can be effective with students in grades 7–12.

First, students form pairs and select characters. They explore and discuss their characters, returning to the text as necessary, until they think they have a thorough understanding of the characters they will play. Students are also asked to adopt the mood of the contemporary setting.

For example, Hamlet might meet Sir Thomas More from "A Man for All Seasons" in a secluded bar just after both have attended the movie *Missing*. Or Ma Joad might meet Tess beside Sorrow's grave after Alec returns as a clergyman and solicits her love. Willy Loman could meet Iago in a crowded coffee shop at 7 a.m. The young Hagar could meet Billy Budd at a country barn dance.

Students are given an hour of class time for preparation, and may do any additional rehearsing at home. (This exercise works best with students who have some experience in improvisation and who have a basic understanding of mood and characterization.)

Each pair presents its creation to the class. After each presentation, students in the audience write journal entries commenting on the degree of credibility each role player has given the character. To back up their opinions, students are asked to refer to specific scenes in the piece from which the character was taken, and to refer to specific words and gestures of the role player. Comments might be divided into two parts—elements which are consistent and elements which are not.

Students then form groups of three to five and decide on the best individual presentation and the best pair presentation. Each group writes and turns in an explanation of the reasons for their choice.

Finally, students individually write their comments about their experiences during all stages of the activity. This can be followed by informal student-teacher discussion, to give students further tips on becoming more effective communicators.

Rudi Engbrecht, Grant Park High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Famous Last Words

Directions: Match the characters in column A with the comical "famous last words" in column B:

A	B
_____1. Mr. Montague to Mrs. Montague	a. "Hi, honey! I'm home!"
_____2. Agamemnon to Clytemnestra	b. "Oh, don't worry so. The kids will be all right."
_____3. Hecuba to King Priam	c. "But shouldn't *someone* check inside that horse?"

History books, newspaper editorials, and private conversations are just a few repositories of "famous last words"—unfortunate and embarrassing utterances regretted later by their speakers. Chamberlain's claim to have achieved "Peace in our time" through his negotiations with Adolf Hitler just before the outbreak of World War II is one prime historical example.

But why confine our search for these prophetic gems to actuality? Fiction and drama provide us with some wonderful opportunities to invent our own. The plots and characters of great literature provide us with a treasure trove of "famous last words" that might have been, so I

recently challenged my students to combine their creativity with literary insight to produce some. I asked them to put words in the characters' mouths that the original authors didn't include in their novels and plays, but which *might* have occurred as suggested by plot lines. During a recent unit in Greek mythology, I provided students with two of the examples that appear in the matching exercise above. Then I asked them to come up with several of their own, based upon any part of their previous literary experience. Here are some of the famous last words my class comedians created:

> Gene meeting Finney in *A Separate Peace*: "I have this tendency to shake things up."
>
> Odysseus's men to the Cyclops: "What's for dinner?"
>
> Sidney Carton approaching the guillotine: "Well, maybe I didn't love her *that* much!"
>
> Gatsby to Daisy: "What's the speed limit here, anyway?"
>
> Ben Hur to his mother: "Remind me to get this roof fixed."
>
> Odysseus to Penelope before the Trojan War: "I sure could use a vacation, honey."
>
> Helen to Menelaus: "I'm going out this evening, dear. Don't wait up."
>
> Juliet to her nurse: "I'd just die if Romeo really liked me."

When the assignments are turned in, they can be read aloud to the class.

Thomas R. Geier, Mount Notre Dame High School, Cincinnati, Ohio

Chaucerian Pilgrims in the High School Classroom

One of the most delightful experiences I have had in teaching occurred when my British literature students suggested that we stage a contemporary version of the host's storytelling contest in the *Canterbury Tales*. We integrated writing, speaking, and listening skills as we identified ourselves with the Canterbury pilgrims.

First, each student chose a member of the contemporary cross section of U.S. society. We had already developed this cross section as an introduction to the *Tales*. Characters chosen included a TV evangelist,

an elderly grandmother, a macho body-builder, a little boy, a radical punker, and so on.

The students wrote descriptions of their characters in the spirit of Chaucer's Prologue (but with characters in cars rather than on horseback!).

The students took a further step in identification with their modern pilgrims by writing stories that they thought their characters would tell in a storytelling contest.

On the important days of our "pilgrimage" together, the students dressed up as the characters with whom they chose to identify. They told their stories extemporaneously, to the enjoyment of all.

When all the "pilgrims" had finished their stories, the students voted on which pilgrim had told the best story. They had agreed ahead of time that they would be willing to chip in to award a free dinner to the winner of the contest.

Throughout the contest, I had served as host—the guide and referee of the contestants. As host, I announced the winner of the contest, our cheerleader character (who had told a story about Biff and Muffy, who were *so happy!*). To conclude our Chaucerian storytelling contest, the class went on a field trip to our version of the Tabard, a local, moderately priced restaurant that is popular with teenagers, and treated the winner to a dinner of her choice.

Marcia S. Van't Hof, Kalamazoo Christian High School, Kalamazoo, Michigan

Camelot Revisited: Mini-Essays

My students had been reading the legends of King Arthur, whose creation of Camelot represents an ideal of community and brotherhood. We brainstormed a list of personal and universal qualities found in Camelot, which today result in an ideal, or at least a better, world. For this assignment, we ignored the realistic and sometimes cruel aspects of life in the Middle Ages and concentrated on the idealized Camelot, with its standards of fairness and decency.

The list (in no particular order):

honesty	determination to overcome evil
honor	courage
duty	virtue

humility	trust
spirit of adventure (actively seeking out situations in which to demonstrate chivalry)	bravery
	courtesy
	faith
	responsibility
loyalty and devotion	readiness to help and protect the weak
generous treatment of foes	justice
piety	love
concept of the Round Table	

I gave each student a 3" × 5" note card with a hole punched in the upper left-hand corner. I then gave the following writing prompt:

> Write a mini-essay (an essay that will fit easily on a note card) on the quality which, if present today, would make a better, more peaceful world. Think in personal terms. What difference would it make if this quality surfaced in our homes? In our school? In our government? In our world?
>
> *Ideas for mini-essay beginnings:*
>
> Camelot would return if . . .
> The values and qualities of community and brotherhood would be possible today if . . .
> The glorious vision of Camelot will become a reality when . . .
> If I were Merlin, everyone would possess the qualities of . . .

The completed essays were stored in a three-ring binder, where they were available for others to read. This exercise turned out to be good preparation for a final paper on chivalry. It helped students to think concretely and to back up their ideas with specific examples.

Stephanie Quate, Thornton High School, Thornton, Colorado

Putting the Classics on Trial

As teachers of English, most of us enjoy the classics and would like to see our students enjoy them too. We feel disappointed and even annoyed when we hand out copies of a classic work, only to hear our students ask, "Are Cliffs Notes available?" or to hear students planning trips to the video store to rent the movie version of the work.

To combat such student attitudes, I try to find approaches that pique

students' interest enough to get them reading. The following approach is one that has worked with *The Scarlet Letter:*

I prepare by writing characters' names on slips of paper and placing the slips in a box at the front of the room. I use each character's name an equal number of times: I write "Hester" on eight slips, "Dimmesdale" on eight slips, and "Chillingworth" on eight slips. On four or five slips, I write "jury." Students draw a slip of paper, and each "legal" team is then made up of all students who drew the same designation.

I give students the following written instructions:

> Your test for *The Scarlet Letter* will involve both team and individual activities. As a "legal" team you will be responsible for defending your "client" during the trial. Working together as a legal team and client, you will present to the jury the effects of sin on your particular character's life. You will also try to convince the jury that the other two characters are more guilty (sinful) than your character. The trial will be conducted in the following way:
>
> 1. Hester Prynne and her legal counsel:
>   A prepared speech (6 minutes)
> 2. Chillingworth:
>   The Chillingworth team's cross-examination of Hester (3–5 minutes)
>   The Chillingworth team's prepared speech (6 minutes)
>   The Dimmesdale team's cross-examination of Hester (3–5 minutes)
>   A six-minute preparation period for a refutation
>   Refutation of Hester's speech by the Dimmesdale team (3–5 minutes)
> 3. Dimmesdale:
>   Prepared speech (6 minutes)
>   The Prynne team's cross-examination of Dimmesdale (3–5 minutes)
>   A six-minute preparation period for a refutation
>   Dimmesdale's team refutes what Chillingworth has said (3–5 minutes)
> 4. Wrap-up (rebuttal) speeches:
>   Hester's team (2 minutes)
>   Dimmesdale's team (2 minutes)
>   Chillingworth's team (2 minutes)

5. The jury's decision concerning who was most affected by sin and who was most sinful is due the day after the trial is completed. The jury is asked to present a written summary of each character's presentation, commenting on the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation. Closing remarks to the court regarding the jury's decision should be made, and remarks to the characters are also permitted.

When I conducted this activity, I asked several faculty members who had a preparation period at the appropriate time to serve on the jury in addition to the four or five student jurors. (Parents are another possible source for jury members.)

Some ideas to help students gather evidence and organize information might include the following: keeping a response journal while reading; listing questions about characters or events as they come up during reading; taking turns summarizing the events in different chapters; and participating in a question-and-answer session the day before the trial, in which students volunteer to try to answer their peers' questions about particular chapters. I was pleasantly surprised by my students' response to this activity. The prospect of trial proceedings helped motivate students to read the text in their search for evidence for or against particular characters; students searched the Bible and other sources, and were enthusiastic about participating in a trial.

Gayle F. Jordan, Charles Henderson High School, Troy, Alabama

Ghost Chapters

A ghost chapter is a chapter that did not appear in a story, but could have. It is that "missing" chapter after a character answers the telephone and the author switches scenes, or that "missing" chapter after the main character walks out of the room and reappears two days later. It is any scene or chapter that the reader creates in his or her mind which explains action that was not actually in the story.

The "ghost chapter" is far from my original idea. It was first described by Umberto Eco. The reason I enjoy using the ghost chapter is that it requires that students become active readers. They cannot passively read a story or watch a movie. Instead, they are asked to attend to their own inferences and then turn those inferences into "actuality."

Before I ask my students to create ghost chapters, I have them write

"I wonder" statements. In "I wonder" statements, students question why characters act the way they do or examine what would happen if certain characters were to respond differently. However, an "I wonder" statement does not have to refer only to characters; for instance, it could refer to a setting, as in this statement: "I wonder what would change if this story took place in Tahiti instead of Georgia."

At first, students resist writing "I wonder" statements. As one sophomore said after writing statements while watching the movie *Stand by Me*, "It was like working. How come we couldn't just *watch* the movie?" Another student noted that even though she had seen the movie many times, this time she saw it differently just because of the "I wonder" statements.

I then ask students to choose one of their "I wonder" statements and turn it into reality by writing a ghost chapter. I give the following instructions:

> Write a ghost chapter for a novel, a story, a movie—or any piece of fiction. In your ghost chapter, show your reader what might have happened had the author decided to incorporate this scene or chapter in your novel, story, or movie. Be sure to remain consistent with the author's work.

Planning and writing ghost chapters makes students think more carefully about the way the story or novel fits together and about their own impressions of characters, setting, and action.

Grace Herr, West Linn High School, West Linn, Oregon

Getting into Character

This writing assignment can be used with one particular work, for example, *Hamlet*, or with several works at the end of a unit of study. The students are first given a list of literary characters from which to choose. Not all characters will work with this assignment; a well-developed tragic character will provide the richest source of material for these questions. Students are assigned to write a monologue from their character's point of view, using the following suggestions:

> As a springboard for your theme's content, use the following questions: (These questions do not dictate content or order, but they do suggest important aspects of character development to explore.)

1. What were your motivations in life, your springs of action?
2. Who was most intimately involved in your fate?
3. What was the nature of that involvement? What would you wish to say to the person(s) now?
4. What do you regard as your principal failings or weaknesses?
5. What do you regard as your principal strengths or successes?
6. Were you ever guilty of misjudgment?
7. Should you be commended for an admirable or courageous action or decision?
8. Were you ever a victim? Did you ever allow yourself to be taken advantage of?
9. What was the nature of other people's power over you? How did these people affect you?
10. What was the nature of your power over others? How did you affect them?
11. What moments of your life do you recall as having been most painful and distressing?
12. Did you ever experience moments of happiness or hope? When did you experience these moments?
13. Did your experiences heighten your awareness of life or enrich you or make you wiser?
14. Did you change because of your life's experiences?

As you write, assume the character's personality, psychological makeup, interests, and so on. Let the character reveal his or her innermost feelings, needs, conflicts, loves, hates, and beliefs.

When I used this activity with high school seniors, I had them write the monologue and then use it as a basis for role-playing the character. Following each interpretation, the group interacted with the character. The activity was quite successful and made students feel much closer to the characters in the works we were reading.

Deanna Tressin, Junction City High School, Junction City, Kansas

What Does This Have to Do with Me?

In struggling to make students understand that the study of classic world, British, and American literature does have relevance in today's society, I came up with the following extra credit assignment. I have used it successfully with average and honors level ninth- to twelfth-grade students.

The gist of the assignment is this: students are asked to be on the lookout for literary allusions that relate to something we have studied or discussed in class. When students find an allusion, they do the following:

1. Bring the magazine or newspaper article to class.
2. Copy the quote containing the allusion onto an index card and briefly explain how it is used in the article and how it relates to what we have studied. Also, include the source of the quote (the speaker), where it was printed, and the date of publication.
3. If the allusion is heard in class, on TV, or in a movie, the student may quote the allusion as best he or she can remember it, tell where and when it was heard, and explain how it relates to what we studied.

Good examples of allusions are shared with the class. This is an informal way to reinforce what we've studied, as well as to give students a chance to earn extra credit.

Kathy McGowan, Broughton High School, Raleigh, North Carolina

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

I've had a great deal of success with an activity centering on an imaginary dinner party.

Each year, one of my classes stages a "Dinner Party of the Mind." Each student is allowed to "invite" two guests—historical, political, literary figures or characters from literary works. The students then devise, create, collect, and arrange a table place setting appropriate to their guests' personalities and lives. The result is a giant imaginary dinner party featuring the most intriguing and interesting guests imaginable.

Our imaginary dinner party is inspired by the 1979 book and gallery showing by the artist Judy Chicago. Chicago's presentation was an artistic tour de force which set out to symbolize and honor the achievements of women with specially created table settings. She wrote that "the women would be the honored guests. Their representation in the form of plates set on the table would express the way women had been confined, and the piece would thus reflect both women's achievements and their oppression" (*The Dinner Party* by Judy Chicago, Anchor Books, 1979, p. 11). Our adaptation of this concept was meant simply to symbolize the

significance of our invited guests by an appropriate and symbolic dinner place setting created from various objects and props.

Our resulting dinner parties have been spectacular! Staged in one room of the school library, the dinner-party display attracts visitors from all over the school. The students set up long library tables, cover them with white tablecloths, and proceed to create characters with their table settings.

Guests from the past have included the following:

> Macbeth and Lady Macbeth—drinking from "blood"-stained goblets and eating with jeweled daggers, from ebony plates
>
> Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara—sipping mint juleps and eating from china, surrounded by magnolia blossoms
>
> Salvador Dali—eating, of course, from a "melted" plate and drinking from a "melted" cup
>
> Jacques Cousteau—dining from a fish-shaped plate surrounded by seaweed
>
> Juliet—enjoying her meal from a rose-embossed plate placed on a delicate lace mat which partially hides a dagger
>
> The Great Gatsby—supping magnificently from silver and crystal, with a picture of Daisy at his place

Other guests have included Marlowe's Passionate Shepherd and Raleigh's Nymph, Socrates, Willy Loman, Merlin, Woody Allen, Dante, and Franz Kafka. In the past few years our dinner guests have been themed according to particular units of study. One year we invited the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece, in conjunction with a mythology unit, and last year we hosted "speakers for nature"—environmentalists and nature writers such as Thoreau, Emerson, Mary Austin, Audubon, and Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings.

Brenda Fazio, Lake Highland Preparatory School, Orlando, Florida

So Much Depends

As we study poetry, my students frequently display frustration, if not anger, when we arrive at the twentieth century. They have a hard time believing that free verse is even poetry at all. They suddenly become "intellectual snobs" and say that Shakespeare or Wordsworth or

Poe, whose form announced the "poetry" of each poem. When we discuss "The Red Wheelbarrow" by William Carlos Williams, I assure them that the poet sensed what they are feeling, particularly when he said, "There is no such thing as free verse. Verse is measure of some sort."

Nevertheless, my students don't want to hear that Williams wrote a "poetry of experience not ideas." They may listen to my saying that Williams wanted to make art out of everyday experience, to make us all aware of the rich possibilities in our own existence. But they get to the white chickens and they say, "So what?" They hear that there is no message from the poet, no hidden meaning, but simply an object called a poem for them to experience the way the poet experienced the wheelbarrow. And they say, "It doesn't mean anything to me."

To help make students more open-minded, I provide them this hands-on experience. It begins with my copying "The Red Wheelbarrow" on the chalkboard and handing out the following instructions:

> As you know, "The Red Wheelbarrow" is an example of an imagist poem. It uses words to create a simple visual image. (If you close your eyes you should be able to see the red wheelbarrow, the rainwater glistening on it, and the white chickens nearby.)
>
> You will also notice that the poem does not rhyme, but it is carefully set up: seven lines alternating three words, one word, three words, one word, . . . so on.
>
> The poem pushes us to wonder *what* depends so much on this image. What could be so important about the wheelbarrow—the momentary experience? How about its real use in the real world? How about the poem itself?
>
> Today I want you to close your eyes and try to capture in your mind something visual that you consider significant (or beautiful or moving, or symbolic). Then write an imagist poem to make us all see what you see. Start like this:
>
> So much depends
> upon
>
> Then write the last five lines using the same pattern Williams does—alternating lines of three words with lines of one word.

Sometimes the results of this activity have, to use Williams's term, reverberated:

So much depends
upon
the white gloves
soaked
with melted snow
beside
an abandoned car.
—Doreidy F.

So much depends
upon
the basketball player
glistening
with body sweat
poised
with the ball.
—Jamena C.

Andrea G. Geffner, Walton High School, Bronx, New York

Priming the Pump

Here's a way to provoke interest in a group of poems to be read and studied, and to give students some low-pressure poetry-writing practice as well.

Instead of announcing that poetry is in the offing, compile a list of open-ended or short first lines from poems that you plan to have students study. A sample list follows:

Poem Starters

1. Remember me when . . . .
2. Near this spot are . . . .
3. Is there anybody there?
4. I know that I shall . . . .
5. My parents kept me from . . . .
6. A trick that everyone abhors . . . .
7. First paint a cage . . . .
8. Under cover of night and rain . . . .
9. Spring is like a . . . .
10. When I was young . . . .

Sources

1. "Remember"	Christina Rossetti
2. "An Epitaph to a Dog"	George Gordon, Lord Byron
3. "The Listeners"	Walter de la Mare
4. "An Irish Airman Foresees His Death"	William Butler Yeats
5. "My Parents Kept Me From Children Who Were Rough"	Stephen Spender
6. "Rebecca, Who Slammed Doors for Fun and Perished Miserably"	Hilaire Belloc
7. "To Paint the Portrait of a Bird"	Jacques Prévert
8. "dandelions"	Deborah Austin
9. "Spring is like a Perhaps Hand"	e. e. cummings
10. "Piñones"	Leroy Quintana

Have students choose one opener and freewrite for five to ten minutes *without stopping*. If they can't think of anything to say, tell them to keep writing anyway and not to stop to edit, alter, or revise. Suggest that students use active verbs and concrete nouns. They may let their imaginations take them, but should adhere as much as possible to the tone and mood suggested by the first line. At the freewriting stage, students should be writing in prose, not worrying about form or line breaks. If they have trouble choosing a beginning line, suggest that they try closing their eyes and letting a finger pick one at random.

Next, as homework, or during class time, have students shape their freewriting into poetic form. Encourage students to eliminate, add, rearrange, or change words at their discretion.

Finally, volunteers share their poems one by one. After a poem is read by a student, read the original poem to the class. Ask students to comment on how their classmates' poems and the poems from the anthology are similar or different.

As an extension, ask students to bring in favorite poems of their own; as a class, students could contribute to a chalkboard list for use in another freewriting. Partial first lines might also be used as journal entry prompts.

Inga Smith, Columbus, Ohio

Reading Reactions

In recording their personal responses to literature, students sometimes gain inspiration by working from a sentence lead-in. I provide the instructions and possible lead-ins below. I also encourage students to suggest alternate lead-ins, and we add the best ones to the list.

Instructions

Write your personal responses to the book you are reading. Be truthful, thoughtful, and thorough. Write about what you like or dislike, and what seems confusing or unusual. Make predictions, relate personal experiences, relate this work to others you have read. Do *not* summarize the plot.

You will be graded on the content of your reaction, on how well you show that you have read the assignment, and on your independent thinking about the book.

It may help you to begin with a sentence lead-in. Each time you write a new response, you may create your own lead-in or choose one of the following. Write at least one full paragraph in response to the chosen lead-in:

I wonder what this means . . .

I really like/dislike this idea because . . .

This character reminds me of somebody I know because . . .

This character reminds me of myself because . . .

I think this setting is important because . . .

This scene reminds me of a similar scene in _____ (title of work) because . . .

This part is realistic/unrealistic because . . .

I like/dislike this writing style because . . .

This section is particularly effective because . . .

This section makes me think about ____ _____ because . . .

I think the relationship between _____ and _____ is interesting because . . .

This situation reminds me of a similar situation in my own life. It happened when . . .

The character I most admire is _____ because . . .

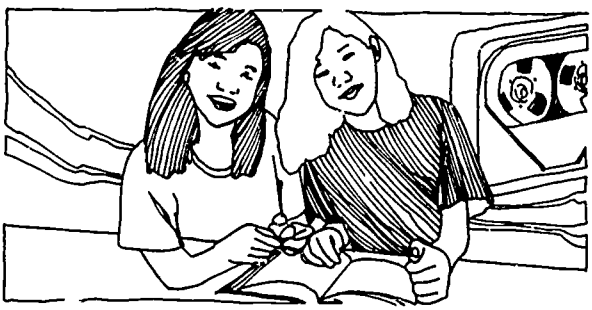
If I were _____, at this point, I would . . .

Patricia Phelan, Crawford High School, San Diego, California

Living Books

Not all students enjoy reading aloud, but given a goal such as recording books on tape, students may both enjoy it and learn from it.

The motivation for this project came about when I called the Arizona Library for the Blind and found out that it had very few adolescent novels on tape. I started this "Living Books" program both to provide the needed books on tape and to give my students practice in dramatic reading.



I asked each student to find a partner, and each pair to choose a contemporary novel to read aloud. In our case, the blank cassette tapes were provided by our Parents' Association.

Before taping their books, students needed tips on oral interpretation, as well as practice. We talked about the importance of speaking clearly; of speaking loudly enough; of maintaining an even, moderate speed; and of using emphasis and inflection appropriately. Using short excerpts from their chosen novels, students practiced these skills with their partners until they felt they were ready to make their tapes. Students recorded their practice sessions to become accustomed to using the tape recorder to check and correct themselves. (Students who are truly intimidated by the idea of recording long passages may want to be excused from preparing final tapes, but they will still benefit from the reading tips and the practice with their peers.)

Students either divided their novels in half—each member of the pair reading half—or alternated chapters. Some students even took parts and read as if taping a radio broadcast.

The benefits of this project were enormous; students became more comfortable with dramatic reading and increased their self-esteem. In

addition, they knew that their tapes were going to be very much appreciated by the teenagers who would listen to them.

Suzanne Shadonix, Our Mother of Sorrows Junior High, Tucson, Arizona

Group Role-Play

Next time you wrap up a novel or play, have students role-play interviews in groups representing each major character. The group setting minimizes stage fright and fosters a feeling of support that lets students tap a well of emotions. What's more, students have fun getting at the heart of the story.

Basically, participants take on the roles of characters in a work and, as these characters, ask and answer questions of one another. Originally created (as it appears here) for an end-of-unit session on Judith Guest's *Ordinary People*, the activity could work with almost any novel or play. (It was the highlight of my student teaching experience at Evanston Township High School.)

First, divide the class into groups, naming each group after a major character in the work. Then hand out the following instructions: (The names and suggested topics will obviously change, according to the novel or play being used.)

> Tomorrow you will be either Cal, Con, Beth, or Jeannine, the major characters from *Ordinary People*, in a group role-play. You have just found out what character you will play; tonight, think of one question you would ask each of the *other* characters from the point of view of *your* character—for a total of three questions. I will collect them at the end of the period tomorrow. The following are suggested areas for questions:
>
> | | | | |
> |---|---|---|---|
> | Love | Control | Trust | Daughter |
> | Family | Chance | Looks | Husband |
> | Responsibility | Luck | Feelings | Wife |
> | Guilt | Accident | Father | Psychiatrist |
> | Punishment | Suicide | Mother | Laughter |
> | Order | Friendship | Son | |
>
> In tomorrow's activity you may stray from your three questions, but you will still need to bring them to class. Remember that you

are asking these questions from the point of view of your character. Also, be prepared to answer questions from your character's point of view. Tomorrow each group will have the same amount of time to answer questions from the entire class.

As teacher, you'll want to prepare some questions yourself the night before. They'll spark ideas the next day and bring reluctant participants to life. Here are a few samples:

Beth: Con, what did I do to you to make you want to kill yourself?

Con: Beth, why are you never around when I need you?

Jeannine: Cal, what do you want for your son?

Con: Cal, I'm not going to college. I want to write music for a living. What do you think?

Cal: Beth, why can't you show your feelings?

Robert J. Williamson, Winnetka, Illinois

3 Prewriting and Writing

Writing can be satisfying and enjoyable when the words flow, but when the words stick, writing can be excruciating. To make sure that words flow for our students when they need them, we want to make writing a natural and comfortable activity. One of the ways we can achieve this is by giving students frequent, varied writing practice in a relaxed atmosphere. The teaching ideas in this section provide many opportunities for writing practice and for helping students become confident, effective writers. Students learn the benefits of outlining a draft, use Rube Goldberg cartoons as a basis for talking and writing about cause and effect, and practice descriptive writing by "magnifying the moment," among other activities.

Causal Analysis à la Rube Goldberg

I use this exercise as an introduction to the cause-and-effect paper. It is a motivational assignment requiring critical thinking, analysis, and creativity. It was inspired by a process-narrative assignment in the college text *The Practice of Writing* by Robert Scholes and Nancy Comley (St. Martin's Press, 1981).

After first discussing how students use cause and effect in their daily discourse (complaining about why they couldn't go to the party, or "what happened when . . ."), I introduce Rube Goldberg's process cartoons. The students are immediately captivated by the absurdity, logic, and humor of his mechanical inventions. (One source for Goldberg's cartoons is *Bobo Baxter: An Original Compilation* [Hyperion Press, 1986].)

On the overhead, I project one of Goldberg's cartoons *with* his explanation, and we discuss the logical sequencing of cause and effect. Next, we view another Goldberg illustration *without* his narrative. Students collaborate in small groups, then share their interpretations of what is going on. I then ask them, individually, to write a cause-and-effect process describing the sequence of events in the cartoon.

Again, we share a few of the responses. Students begin to comment: "This guy gets paid for that? I could do it." So next, we brainstorm some possible "inventions" that could be created: "Lorenzo's Auto-Drip Toothbrush," "Maggie's Marvelous Meat Chewer," "Paul's Super-Duper Automatic Alarm Clock," and so on.

Students then devise their own cause-and-effect inventions à la Rube Goldberg. While the visual processing of the cartoon is important, I place emphasis on students' *descriptions* of how one action leads to another.

This is a step-by-step process that provides for inventive thinking and logical analysis. From here, we move on to other written models of cause and effect. I have also found the cartoon-processing an opportune time to introduce causal transitions and to model stylistic elements of complex sentence structure, thus preparing students for writing longer papers.

Jay T. Barwell, Orange Grove Middle School, Tucson, Arizona

Essays of Illustration and Comparison

I say, "Our topic today is illustration." The student says, "But I can't draw. And besides that, I left my colored pens at home."

And so it goes. Many students hear the word *illustration* and immediately think of pictures. Fine, let's start with that. To introduce the concept of illustration in composition, I rely upon my students to make a visual connection.

Students enter class and discover each desk stocked with colored construction paper, scissors, glue, several magazines, and a note card inscribed with one abstract word, such as suspicion, justice, imagination, progress, fame, etc. Students focus on their abstract word and cluster the various images and feelings that it elicits. Following this, students create a collage of magazine pictures to illustrate their word's many connotations. (I require at least three connotative responses.)

And finally, students write an illustrative poem or short essay based on their abstract word. Dictionaries are often consulted voluntarily at this time as students attempt to provide a denotative departure or reference point for readers. Collages and accompanying compositions are then displayed on classroom bulletin boards. Here's a representative example:

> Two whispering shadows dance and pose.
> I gaze at them and suppose.
> What brought them out?

It's a bit of suspicion in me.
A dark alley, a lonely night.
Never satisfied, ever mystified.
It's a bit of suspicion in me.

—Johnnette B.

Besides providing a colorful exhibition of student work and serving as a visual synopsis of what illustration is all about, collages and compositions will help to introduce a later unit on comparison and contrast.

To introduce the essay of comparison and to emphasize the interdependence of all forms of writing, I build upon my students' most recently acquired knowledge. On day one of my unit on comparison and contrast, students enter class and find a note card inscribed with a single concrete word, such as stapler, swan, or flag. Next, students cluster their object's many physical characteristics, functions, and actions.

Then comes the mental whammy: students pair up concrete words with their abstract words (the ones they previously illustrated) to find at least five similarities.

"Justice and a canoe? Fame and a candle flame? Come on, Mr. Coats! Are you crazy or what?" After questions about my mental stability subside, students begin a brainstorming session that is generally animated and productive. The result is a paragraph of comparison which illustrates the similarities between two ostensibly dissimilar things. Here are a few examples of students' insightful responses:

> Justice works best when the litigants involved cooperate with each other. So, too, does a canoe. Paddlers can't be paddling towards two different places and expect to get there in the quickest time possible.
>
> —Garland A.

> The glow that emanates from the candle's flame and becomes a source of light to a dark room may be likened to the sparkle and glitter that fame brings to a person's life.
>
> —Moana B.

These two approaches are not ends in themselves. They are intended to be introductory activities that immediately immerse students in the subject and cause them to see the interrelatedness of all forms of writing.

Reggie Coats, Kamehameha Schools, Honolulu, Hawaii

Collaborative Book Reports

Here's a book-report assignment that students may remember more fondly than the others. This approach stresses collaboration in pairs; in addition, since students are in essence *telling* their book reports to their partners, to be written down and revised by their partners, they must express themselves clearly and evaluate the written results carefully.

Before having your students form pairs, ask each student to decide on a book and spend five minutes brainstorming on paper. Ask students to list details that call to mind the most memorable character (major or minor) in their book, and the most memorable incident. The incident need not be the high point or climax of the story, but might be one that the student found particularly frightening, humorous, or moving.

In their pairs, students take turns telling each other about their characters and incidents. First, one student talks and the other listens and takes notes; then roles are reversed. Fifteen to twenty minutes should be enough for this step.

Each listener uses his or her notes to write a description of the character and a narrative of the incident. This takes about ten minutes.

Students next exchange writings with their partners. In evaluating the written copy, each student is asked to underline the sentence in each item (character description and narrative) that seems to best capture what was told. (If the writing doesn't seem to convey what the student who read the book intended, that student may need to confer with his or her partner and offer advice on what parts to add or change.) The student reading the written copy should also comment on any inaccuracies or misleading information.

In the margin, the reader also writes two additional details to be included. The writings are then returned to their authors.

Students revise their writings as homework or as classwork the next day; they add the requested details and make any changes necessary to make the book report more accurate. Their partners look at the writings again briefly to approve the changes.

Students now proofread and edit their drafts; their partners read the final copy and give a "grade" in the form of comments—acknowledging the best parts and noting overall impressions, for example, "This is exactly how I pictured this character," or "This description is pretty good, but it leaves out a few important details about how this event happened."

Rose Lee Davis, Chillicothe High School, Chillicothe, Missouri

The Green Book

This past summer I was a member of a class designed for English teachers called "Reading and Writing about London" taught by Stephen Tchudi and Marilyn Wilson of Michigan State University. The class, held for four weeks at the University of London, featured several notable speakers, including John Dixon, renowned British educator and writer. It was Dixon who gave our class a simple yet effective idea concerning the publishing of student writing in the classroom.

Dixon related that when he taught English in the London schools he would keep a big, blank, green book on his desk. When one of his students wrote something exceptional he would say, "That belongs in the green book." Students would then copy the sentences, paragraphs, or selections into the book and become instantly "published." He reported that the book became a source of great pride for his students. They felt honored to have their writing chosen, and they also liked to read the work of their classmates. It also provided him with a permanent reminder of their work.

After Dixon spoke, our class decided to keep a "green book" of our experiences in London. Like the students in Dixon's classes, we also felt great pride when we found "the book" written beside a piece of prose or poetry in our journals. On our last night in London, selections were read from "the book" and they provided a very fitting ending to our London experiences.

This fall I decided to use "the green book" in my junior English

classes. It has met with great success. When I hand back journals or papers, the book disappears from my desk at the beginning of the hour and returns at the end filled with students' selections. We are now one-third of the way through the year, and more than half my students are represented. It is my hope that every student will write something that will make it into "the green book."

The best aspect of this sort of publication is that the book is being read. Students are interested in what their classmates write, and "the book" is the most popular reading material in my room.

John J. Erickson, Osseo High School, Osseo, Minnesota

(John J. Erickson's "The Green Book" originally appeared in the March, 1989 Writing/Secondary English Newsletter, *Vermont State Department of Education, edited by Geof Hewitt. Reprinted with permission.)*

Choreography for Mixed Voices

In this assignment, students create a unique piece of writing: an arrangement of two or three distinct voices which express different thoughts or feelings on a topic, and which address the reader rather than each other. Here are the instructions for students:

> Your goal is to create a piece in which we hear several voices, but in which there is no dialogue.
>
> First, think of at least two characters who are somehow related to each other. They may be members of the same family, friends or business associates, perhaps a teacher and a student.
>
> Next, think of a topic that would be common to each of the characters. Here are some suggestions: a movie, last week's dance, dieting, an eccentric acquaintance, a favorite place, a strange habit. Then follow these steps:
>
> 1. Write a monologue expressing what one of the people says or is thinking about the topic. Allow the reader to hear that person's voice. What is distinctive about it? Consider how vocabulary and sentence structure might contribute to the individuality of this voice.
> 2. Write the speech or thoughts of the other person(s). Be sure to consider what makes the voice(s) distinctive.
> 3. Now work on a whole piece of writing in which we hear the

voices of these characters. They are not talking to each other or responding to each other. You are not creating a scene or situation. Instead, it is purely writing; your voices talk through your writing to the reader, who hears the contrast in perspectives and pieces together the context.

Design the writing so that all of the perspectives together create a whole. Do not include any outside narrative voice or a third-person perspective. What we will hear is two or three first-person perspectives on a particular topic. What they say will probably echo, answer, question, and contradict each other, and that will allow the reader to see the larger context.

You can arrange the voices on the page in any order you wish. Perhaps we will see/hear alternating paragraphs of voices, perhaps all of one, then all of the other(s). One voice may interject throughout the monologue of another. The effect will be that of a dialogue, but there will be no dialogue. You will let the reader know who is talking by what the speaker says.

Experiment! Be creative! Have fun with the words!

Bring your finished writing, along with five copies, to your next writing group.

After students discuss their writings in a writing group and make any desired changes they are free to share their writings with the rest of the class. Some students may even be interested in performing their dialogues aloud with the help of a friend or volunteer.

An excerpt from one student's writing follows:

I wonder what's for lunch? There she is again, why doesn't she talk to me. She always hits on the freshmen.

He looks nice today; he always looks nice. I wonder if my hair is O.K. Did he notice me?

Maybe if I ask her to go to the movies Friday she'll pay more attention to me. . . .

Did he look at me? Why doesn't he look at me? He must hate my hair.

Calc test today . . . Get away from my locker you Freshman. . . . I'll ask her about Friday. I'm not busy. What if she is?

I am so happy. I can't believe he asked me. . . . Maybe I should have gone to Ian's house. I'll ask him if he is sure he still wants to take me

and if not, then I'll go to Ian's. . . . I'll ask Jen what she thinks I should do. She'll probably say: How can you be so stupid?

How could she even think of going to Ian's? After she talked about him for so long. He finally asks her to go to the movies and she wants to know if she should go to Ian's. How can she be so stupid?

Tricia Hansbury-Zuendt, Canajoharie High School, Canajoharie, New York

(Tricia Hansbury-Zuendt's "Choreography for Mixed Voices" appeared in slightly different form under the title "Expressive Writing" in the Summer, 1989 Writing/Secondary English Newsletter, *Vermont State Department of Education, edited by Geof Hewitt. Reprinted with permission.)*

"Did You Ever Feel . . .?"

One night Johnny Carson asked a guest how life had been treating him, and the guest replied, "Did you ever feel like the whole world was a black tuxedo and you were a pair of brown loafers?" As teachers, I think we often feel this way when interruptions occur during class time. I handed out a chapter reading test one day, and ten minutes into the period a "false" fire alarm sounded. After marching out and then returning to our test, central sound called for six students to report to the clinic for a hearing test. My face must have shown my consternation because a student asked, "What's the matter, Mrs. G., a bad day?" I answered with the quote above. We spent the week writing our own "Did You Ever Feel . . . ?" statements. Sample writings are as follows:

> Did you ever feel like the whole world was a Brahm's lullaby and you were a sour note?
>
> Did you ever feel like the whole world was a honey-cured country ham and you were a rotten egg?
>
> Did you ever feel like the whole world was a box of hand-dipped chocolates and you were a green jelly bean?

These are fun to use for writing warm-ups, journal entries, and creative writing.

S. Kay Gehrmann, Burlington Community High School, Burlington, Iowa

Walking through a Painting

This assignment gives students a sense of connection with a work of abstract art, and helps them use writing to express that sense of connection.

First, select slides which lend themselves to various interpretations. Instruct students to take a piece of paper and fold it vertically. Students are to work down the left and then the right column, filling the page with words and phrases reflecting their ideas about the artwork. Remind the students to be as descriptive as possible in their word choice.

Since many students are frustrated by abstract art, a series of questions to elicit answers is helpful. The following questions will help you "walk" students through the painting:

1. Sitting on the frame of the painting, what do you see?
2. Jumping onto the surface of the painting, what does it feel like?
3. Do you notice anything to the left of you? To the right of you?
4. Can you identify any figures in the painting?
5. If those figures could speak, what would they be saying?
6. Moving around inside the picture, what is the temperature like?
7. Do you feel comfortable in your surroundings?
8. If you had the opportunity, would you stay?
9. Is there a background which can be reached?
10. Are there any dominant shapes? Colors? Lines?
11. If you could taste the scene, what would it taste like?
12. Can you reach the background? Is anything stopping you?
13. Looking around the background, do you notice anything that you previously missed?
14. If you could touch particular parts of the scene, what would they feel like?
15. Does the picture remind you of any place you have been?
16. Does the picture bring to mind any books you have read?
17. As you walk back to the frame, looking to your left and right, have you missed any details?
18. Take a closer look at the picture if you wish. Is there something of interest that you have overlooked?

After students respond to the questions, give them time to fill in the

columns on their page. Pausing in between questions allows for greater student response. There are various methods which students could use to arrange these phrases into a more structured end result. You might suggest the following:

1. Underline a common phrase or word which runs throughout your writing, and concentrate on this idea.
2. Connect words or phrases which you feel belong together.
3. Arbitrarily pick a phrase from the left column and connect it with one from the right column.
4. Create a story or poem, incorporating your favorite ideas.

After students have organized their ideas, have them formalize their writing in the form of a poem. You may wish to make this a homework assignment or journal entry. Remind students that they need to be concise in their interpretation and that every word counts.

Students may share their final versions with the class and compare the different impressions they received from the artwork.

To conclude the exercise, let students contribute their favorite lines and put together a class poem. Examples of an individual poem and a class poem follow:

On Giorgio De Chirico's "Anxious Journey"
(individual poem)
Doors of dominoes lean
Aching from emptiness.
Elongated, Gothic relics without the people.
Yet, the city spouts flames
like a train going nowhere.
Motionless and stagnant.

On Giorgio De Chirico's "Anxious Journey"
(class poem)
Innocence dies.
Brick walls protect the guilty.
Secret sacrifices of
hearts.
Hurting, graying . . .
The cold breeds loneliness.

Karen M. Lelli, Bishop O'Connell High School, Arlington, Virginia

Magnified Moments

This activity works well with writers of all ages and levels of expertise. It gives students practice in adding sensory detail, images, thoughts, vivid verbs, dialogue, and specific examples to writing, and in turning "telling" statements into "showing" statements.

This activity takes place during the revision step of the writing process. Students use the basic skeleton of a story and flesh it out by "magnifying" some of the statements. After practicing the technique a few times, students are asked to apply the procedure to their own writing by choosing appropriate sentences from their first drafts and magnifying them.

First, model the process with the entire group by writing a telling sentence on the board. An example might be, "My little sister is spoiled." Talk with students about what makes this sentence a "telling" sentence and not a "showing" sentence. You might ask, "Are there any words in this sentence that create a picture in your mind?" "Are there details that help explain or back up what the sentence is saying?" Using student suggestions, magnify the statement by listing detailed sentences that *show* that the sister is spoiled. After the process has been completed, discuss which is better and why: the single telling sentence or the magnified list of showing sentences.

Next, divide the class into five or six small groups. Give each group a skeleton sentence and ask it to appoint a scribe and a reader. Then give the groups five minutes to magnify their sentences. The finished products are shared with the class.

Students should now be ready to work on magnifying sentences individually. Write a paragraph of telling sentences on the chalkboard, numbering each sentence. Here's an example of a paragraph that could be magnified:

1. When I was seven years old I wanted a bike.
2. Finally, my parents bought me my first two-wheeled bike.
3. I didn't know how to ride it, but I kept trying.
4. One day I got on it and stayed on.
5. I was going fast and didn't know how to stop.
6. I was headed down a hill.
7. I crashed into a bush and stopped.

Sign up an equal or close to equal number of student volunteers for

each numbered sentence. Each student then writes a paragraph or more to magnify the selected sentence. The additional sentences that students write should not go beyond the time frame of the original sentence by including anything that happens *next;* all the details should expand on what is included and implied in their original sentence. For example, here are several sentences that might be written for sentence No. 1 in the list above:

> When I was seven years old, I desperately wanted a two-wheeled bike. All my friends had bikes. On Saturdays I would beg my dad to go down to the hardware store and look at the bikes with me. The bike I liked best was red and white. My dad kept telling me I had to wait a little longer.

After students have completed the writing, they read their magnified sentences aloud: first, a student with sentence No. 1 reads, then a student with sentence No. 2, and so on, until the entire paragraph has been read. Then the paragraph is read through again, with different students reading, until all students have had a chance to read their sentences in sequence.

At the conclusion of these magnifying activities, students can be asked to find two to three telling sentences within their own papers and to use the concepts they learned to make these into showing sentences.

Subsequent student writing has borne out the value of this procedure. In addition, I've found that the idea of magnification seems to stick in students' minds. Some weeks after using this activity, I was trying to get one of my students to be more specific during a class discussion. He wasn't getting the point. Finally, one of the other students said in exasperation, "You know . . . she wants you to *magnify* it!"

Rosilene Capell, Lakeridge Junior High School, Orem, Utah

Rules, Regulations, and Rigmarole

High school students are quite intrigued by this thinking and writing activity. To prepare, I procure copies of sets of rules from several different organizations. My favorites are (1) the regulations for inmates at Alcatraz (purchased at the gift shop there), (2) sections from the Rule of St. Benedict (a religious order), (3) bylaws from a civic organization to which I belong, and (4) our own school rules. It is important that the organizations be different from one another and convey a distinctive *tone*.

I read passages from each set of rules, and have the students jot down notes in three columns on their papers. I have them title the columns "Organization," "Examples," and "Purpose." As I read, students write down brief reminders of some of the rules they hear and try to guess the nature of the organization and the reason for these rules (e.g., to maintain order, to provide an atmosphere for spiritual growth, to enable the organization to do its business and pass its resolutions).

When students are finished with their "educated guessing," I go through each set of rules, one by one, and ask students to tell me the organization and the purpose. They tend to be more successful at guessing the type of organization than they are at guessing the purpose for specific rules. This gives us occasion to think and talk about the need for varying rules in different settings.

After this "percolation activity," the students complete one of the following writing projects:

1. Imagine an organization (preschool, business, health club, etc.) that you'd like to own or run. What kind of climate do you want to foster? Describe that climate and write three rules that you'd require employees to obey. Are there any penalties for violation of your rules?
2. If you were school principal, what kind of student or teacher behavior would you want to see changed? How would you help accomplish this? What would be three basic rules? Would you want to be a student in your own school? Why or why not?
3. You are a parent with seven children, ages 3 to 20. Your life can get complicated, especially when you take your brood to a movie or out to dinner. Of course, you've had these children one at a time and have become an expert on child rearing. Give your imaginative but serious explanation of why your children are so well mannered and cooperative.

Robert J. Hutcheson, Webster Groves High School, Webster Groves, Missouri

Evaluating the Issues

For this activity, each student receives an 11" × 9" two pocket folder with center brads to hold notebook paper. Ask students to choose two political,

social, or economic issues that are *personally important.* Possibilities might include abortion, education, drinking age, drug abuse/prevention, feminist issues, or other concerns, including local ones.

Students label the two pockets of their folder with the two issues. They insert a few sheets of notebook paper in their folders for taking notes on any news broadcasts or speeches they hear.

Then, over a period of several weeks, students collect information on the issues they selected. Articles clipped from newspapers and magazines are saved in the designated pocket. Encourage students to read magazines that offer a variety of viewpoints on their topics, and to listen to radio and television news broadcasts that touch on these issues.

During the news-gathering phase, students are asked to evaluate the material to determine what is fact and what is opinion. They should take into consideration the position of the author: Is he or she a journalist seeking merely to inform, a journalist for a newspaper with a known bias, or a syndicated columnist seeking to persuade?

After several weeks of gathering and evaluating material, students write a report on one or both of their topics. They are asked to respond to the following:

> Comment on the current situation with regard to the issue.
>
> Describe what movement or changes you would like to see take place in regard to this issue.
>
> Would you like to be involved in promoting progress in this area?
>
> What could you do to promote progress?
>
> What organizations, political parties, or political figures hold the same point of view as you?

This activity can be held at any time of the year, but it obviously generates more interest during times of local or national elections.

Judy Ide, Spring Hill, Tennessee

Outlining to Revise

Outlines are sometimes used in planning a piece of writing, but often they are just as valuable in analyzing a rough draft.

Using a traditional outline after the rough draft has been written provides a couple of advantages. First of all, few initial outlines

developed during the prewriting stage completely anticipate the finished composition. As a writer works on a draft, new ideas occur that were not included in the planning outline. Some writers feel as though an outline followed too rigidly may stifle inspiration, so these writers opt for an informal list, a story map, or some other planning device. Other writers simply feel uncomfortable with the formal structure of the outline so early in the process. At the draft revision stage, developing an outline may be less intimidating.

Second, outlining a draft requires close examination of the text, and helps to point out holes and inconsistencies. Here, the rigidity of the formal outline assists rather than intimidates. The rough draft that can be distilled to an effective outline is probably well organized and reasonably complete. If it is not, then the outline will point out where the problems lie, thus making it easier to fix them.

Finally, developing an outline of the rough draft is good practice in using a tool that can save time and anguish during the writing process. If the writer has worked from an initial planning outline, so much the better. The creation of an outline from the draft provides an opportunity to compare pre- and post-draft organization. The writer can ask: How have my ideas expanded? What did I leave out of the draft? These, too, can be important analytic questions.

Procedure

To use outlining as a revision strategy, ask the writer to create an outline of the rough draft. The draft should be treated as finished text for this revision strategy. No changes should be made in it until after the outline is completed. In this way, a true picture of the draft will emerge.

Follow the rules of a traditional, formal outline. Use Roman numerals, capital letters, Arabic numerals, lower case letters, and so on. Remind the student of the dictum, "never an A without a B, never a 1 without a 2." As the student develops the outline, it will probably become apparent that there are points left hanging (i.e., 1s without 2s). When this happens, the writer can leave a blank space in the outline, showing where new information needs to be added.

After the outline is finished, here are some questions the writer should ask:

1. Is the information in the outline in logical order? Does II reasonably follow I, B follow A, and so on?

2. Are ideas sufficiently developed? Was it possible to list a 1 and 2 (maybe an a and b) to elaborate the main point A?
3. Are ideas developed equally? Are there many details to support A but few to support b.
4. Are there ideas that appear in the draft that don't seem to fit anywhere in the outline? Are they really necessary to the composition?
5. Are there "holes" in the outline? Is more information needed to make the composition complete?

The answers to these questions will assist the writer in revising the draft for logical sequence and consistent elaboration.

Donovan R. Walling, Sheboygan Area School District, Sheboygan, Wisconsin

Piecemeal Poetry

While I was student teaching in senior English, I used a prewriting exercise which integrated art and descriptive writing. I placed an abstract painting in the front of the classroom and asked the students to list as many words and phrases as they could think of to describe the painting. Students did not have to form complete sentences or worry about organization.

I collected students' lists at the end of the hour. The painting's bright colors and abstract shapes had elicited many original and poetic descriptions. Students' images included "an explosion that takes place in the dead of night," "a rainbow broken down by a thunderstorm," "a jar full of bubble gum," "balloons floating between thunderclouds," "a shadow slowly drifting over the heart," "a paint-by-number diagram of the small intestine," "ice cream flavors," and "the litter box of a radioactive cat."

I chose at least one description from each of the student's lists and compiled a composite class poem—a piecemeal poem—from these lines. I typed this poem on a ditto master and distributed copies to students after I had rendered a dramatic reading for the class.

The students were impressed with this unconventional assignment and proud of their contributions to the final "piecemeal poem."

This prewriting exercise led into a descriptive essay assignment, which students thought was easier because of the writing practice.

I also shared the composite poems from several classes with the art teacher, who is planning to use them in her own class. She will give the poems to her students and ask them to paint a picture from them. The final step will be to show her students' artwork to the English students who contributed lines to the composite poem.

Laura A. Bagby, Kirksville, Missouri

Getting Started with Writing

The purpose of this assignment is to get the students involved *immediately* in the writing process by showing them that they already know a great deal about writing. The assignment is given on the very first day of school and has been used successfully with seventh-grade students as well as college freshmen.

Students are asked to write a short paper in which they answer these questions: What do you see as the purpose of writing? What is it that makes someone a good writer? How close do you come to your picture of a good writer? How do you go about creating a piece of writing?

Don't expect polished writing. There will have been no discussion of expectations, format, style, or even purpose. It is not students' *writing* you will be considering; rather, it will be their insights into the writing process itself.

Take the finished papers and find one quote to extract from each of them. Make copies for the entire class, and use the student quotes as the basis for discussion. These excerpts will help students realize that collectively they know a great deal about writing.

Examples from seventh-grade papers:

> Chris: The purpose of writing is to communicate with others.
>
> Karie: A good writer is someone who makes the reader understand what the reading.
>
> Paul: Writing is a silent way to speak.
>
> Grant: I'm not too good of a writer. I haven't much experience.

The quotes were put together on a sheet under the heading: *What We Know about Writing*. They became the basis of our subsequent discussions about the purpose and nature of writing.

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