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ABSTRACT

A study of 24 composition anthologies that reprinted E. B. White's "Once More to the Lake" reveals a number of disturbing assumptions among the editors of these anthologies. Four areas of examinations were concentrated on: (1) classifications of White's essay; (2) thematic categories; (3) suggestions for writing; (4) study apparatuses; and (5) context. Results were disparate; they revealed, for instance, that authors place unreasonable demands on students in the study apparatuses they write. Students must be able to read not only the author's but also the editor's mind. Generally, results showed that if there is some agreement about the reasons students should be assigned readings in a composition course, there is little consensus about what kind of reading White's essay is and what students ought to be gaining by reading it and using it as a stimulus. The attempt to teach critical reading may be valuable for readers; the attempt to apply literary approaches to non-fiction prose may be worthwhile for young literary scholars and critics; the attempt to provide a text for a course in the essay may be attractive; but none of these attempts succeeds very well at getting at the center of the composition course--the student's own writing. Most anthologies have precious little to say about the process of composition. (Contains six tables and 34 references.) (TB)

Once More to the Essay: Prose Models, Textbooks, and Teaching

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The summer of 1991 marked the fiftieth anniversary of E. B. White's classic essay "Once More to the Lake." According to Donald Murray, "All nonfiction writers in our time have been students of [E. B. White's], whether they know it or not" (347). For well over half a century, the editors of composition anthologies have steadily provided opportunities for student writers to study his writing.

In hopes of discovering the kinds of consensus such anthologies might have reached about "Once More to the Lake," I randomly selected forty-one recent collections and from that group examined closely twenty-four which reprinted the essay. Centering on their presentation of that single essay, my survey of those anthologies identified several areas for comparison: 1) the categories or classifications in which "Once More to the Lake" was placed, 2) the suggestions for student writing connected to the essay, 3) the study apparatuses appended to it, 4) the contextual background provided, and 5) the underlying rationales which might affect decisions about presentational elements.

Classifying "Once More to the Lake"

A survey of both primary and alternative tables of contents reveals the ways these anthologies classify "Once More to the Lake." The twenty-four collections I examined were organized either by rhetorical mode, genre or pattern of development, by theme or topic, by author, or, in one case, by stages of the composing process; however, no matter what the organization centered on, only two of the twenty-four offered no rhetorical grouping

whatever, even in an alternative table of contents, while only one-third offered no thematic groupings of any kind. It is a given of composition anthologies that they should be flexible enough to accommodate several different approaches among teachers who assign readings.

The difficulties of categorization are described in the introduction to the second edition of one of the author-centered anthologies. In its first edition the editors had "struggled to make a stylistic organization [but] a year after deciding on our organization, it was no longer clear why essay X was to be studied for its sentences, essay Y for its paragraphs," forcing them to conclude that "no piece of real prose is ever so pure as our systems of classification"; to demonstrate the "flaws" of thematic organizations, they ask, "Is E. B. White's theme, in "Once More to the Lake," Mortality? Aging? Youth and Age? or, How I Spent My Summer Vacation?" (Hall, vi-vii). Nonetheless, along with their alphabetical listing these editors still provide a Rhetorical Index which places the essay under three different modes, two patterns of development, and one genre.

Of the 24 readers I examined, sixteen (two-thirds) were organized around rhetorical categories in their primary tables of contents. Of those sixteen, three classified "Once More to the Lake" as narration, four as description, one as exposition; one identified it as a personal essay, one as a classic essay, one as autobiography; one used it in a category for "remembering" and another for "elaborations" while yet another placed it in "Further Reading." Three more votes for narration came from a thematic reader, an authorial reader, and the process reader; two thematic readers identified it as "autobiography," and one authorial reader labeled it both reflection and comparison/contrast. (See Table 1.)

Table 1. Structure and Rhetorical Categories

Title	Structure	Rhetorical Categories
Bedford Reader	Rhetorical	Description
Compact Reader	Rhetorical	Narration
Critical Reader	Rhetorical	Comparison/Contrast
Dolphin Reader	Thematic	None
Eight Modern Essayists	Author	None

Essay 2	Rhetorical	ClassicEssays
Essay Connection	Rhetorical	Narration
Harvest Reader	Rhetorical	Autobiography
In Depth	Author	Comparison/Contrast, Reflection
Inquiring Reader	Rhetorical	Personal Essay
Invention & Design	Rhetorical	Comparison/Contrast
Lexington Reader	Thematic	Narration; Autobiography
Macmillan Reader	Rhetorical	Description
Modern American Prose	Author	Narration
Norton Sampler	Rhetorical	Further Reading
Outlooks and Insights	Thematic	Autobiography
Prentice Hall Reader	Rhetorical	Narration
Read to Write	Process	Narrative
Readings for Writers	Rhetorical	Description
Responsible Reader	Rhetorical	Remembering
Rinehart Reader	Rhetorical	Description
Short Model Essays	Rhetorical	Elaborations
Themes and Variations	Rhetorical	Exposition; Narration, Comparison, 1st Person, Point of View
Writer's Reader	Author Exposition	Description (Place); (Comparison, analysis); Narration (Auto/biography)

Several texts place the essay in more than one category, confounding the labeling; for example, *Themes and Variations,* which identifies it in the primary table of contents as "expository", also catalogues it in an alternative table of contents under "Narration," "Comparison," "First Person Perspective," and "Point of View" (but not under "Reflecting" or "Description"). The editors of *The Bedford Reader,* who identify it in the text as "Description" only, admit in the instructor's manual that the essay is "too marvelous to be a reasonable model for student writers" and "exhibits a whole array of rhetorical methods: description, narration, exemplification, comparison and contrast, definition (of a familiar American experience)" (Kennedy, *Instructor's Manual* 17); however, because in their view "in nearly every paragraph, description predominates," "Suggestions for Writing" attached to the essay ask for descriptive pieces only.

In all of these books, the rhetorical category in which the essay falls depends on the editor's concept of what rhetorical categories are--modes, genres, patterns of development, or

combinations of the three--but few of the editors acknowledge that range of classification to the student. Regardless of the complexity of the essay, most editors tend to design their writing suggestions to encourage composing activity in the specific category in which it appears in the table of contents.

As with rhetorical categories, the editors of these anthologies are divided about the themes that "Once More to the Lake" exemplifies. (See Table 2.)

Table 2. Thematic Categories

Title	Thematic Categories
Bedford Reader	Autobiography, Children / Family, Leisure, Self-Discovery
Compact Reader	None
Critical Reader	Relationships
Dolphin Reader	Mortality
Eight Modern Essayists	None
Essay 2	Nature
Essay Connection	Growing Up, Families, Places, Nature
Harvest Reader	Family
In Depth	Autobiography & Personal Experience; Nature & Natural Experience
Inquiring Reader	None
Invention & Design	Growing Up; Place; Past / Present; Love / Brotherhood; Living / Dying
Lexington Reader	Writing about Places
Macmillan Reader	Family / Children; Memories / Autobiography; Nature / Science
Modern American Prose	None
Norton Sampler	None
Outlooks and Insights	Pastimes
Prentice Hall Reader	Autobiography, Childhood / Family, Leisure Nature / Environment, Self-Discovery
Read to Write	Childhood, Family, Growing, Humor
Readings for Writers	Portrait of Individual
Responsible Reader	Self-Discovery
Rinehart Reader	Sense of Time
Short Model Essays	None
Themes and Variations	None
Writer's Reader	None

Only three collections are expressly thematic in organization but two-thirds of the entire number offer alternative thematic listings, often placing the essay under several different themes. In those fifteen thematic listings, it appears under "Autobiography" (4 times), "Nature" (5), "Childhood" or "Children" or "Family" (5), "Self-Discovery" (4), "Mortality" (6), "Sports and Leisure" (3), "Places" (3), "Humor," "Relationships," and "Love and Brotherhood" (1 each). Perhaps predictably, in many of these anthologies "Once More to the Lake" is omitted from categories into which other anthologies place it-- *Essay2* for example, lists it under "The Threatened World of Nature" but not under "Growing Up American" or "With Family and Friends"; *Read to Write* lists it under four different headings but not "Autobiography" or "Death"; *The Rinehart Reader* lists it under "A Sense of Time" but not "Americana," "The Self," or "Relationships: Family and Friends." Such inclusions and omissions, when surveyed in this fashion, demonstrate just how arbitrary such classifications--whether thematic or rhetorical--truly are. Clearly such classifications, so demonstrably contradictory, misdirect the student's attention to the essay, by making it representative of a narrow category rather than interactive with the reader.

Suggestions for Writing

The focus of "suggestions for writing" in the anthologies I surveyed was most often either generic or imitative. (See Table 3.)

Table 3. Suggestions for Writing

Title	Suggestions for Writing
Bedford Reader	Descriptive paragraph, descriptive / reminiscent essay
Compact Reader	Narrative, Reminiscent
Critical Reader	Descriptive paragraphs, comparative essay, freewrite
Dolphin Reader	None in Text
Eight Modern Essayists	None in Text
Essay 2	Reminiscent, descriptive, generic, imaginative
Essay Connection	Narrative, reminiscent, comparative

Harvest Reader	Reminiscent, imitative
In Depth	None
Inquiring Reader	Describe vacation spot (with answer space in exercise)
Invention & Design	Reminiscence; Values Explanation
Lexington Reader	Descriptive, Reminiscent, Place-oriented
Macmillan Reader	Description as Method of Development, Others
Modern American Prose	Reminiscent, Literary-critical, imitative
Norton Sampler	None
Outlooks and Insights	in Explorations
Prentice Hall Reader	Reminiscent, Narrative (process), Research on memory
Read to Write	Activities analyzing style, reminiscence, anthropology report
Readings for Writers	Descriptive/reminiscent, critical analysis
Responsible Reader	Reminiscent, comparative
Rinehart Reader	Analytical, descriptive/reminiscent
Short Model Essays	Reminiscent, imitative, analytic/critical
Themes and Variations	narrative, imitative, new and revealing descriptive
Writer's Reader	None

The point of the assignment is often to compose in one rhetorical pattern or mode using White's essay as a model. Consider the following example:

> A high point of White's essay is the thunderstorm on a summer afternoon. Write your own description of a similar age-old natural event running its course--a blizzard, the first big rainstorm of a rainy season, a hurricane or the like. (Guth 493)

Clearly the assignment means to limit the writing narrowly to description. The contradiction lies in using as a model a work that is not merely descriptive; White's description of the thunderstorm serves several purposes. Moreover White had recently experienced the thunderstorm when he wrote about it; the assignment assumes that students have well-stored and accessible detailed memories of "age-old natural events" like hurricanes which they can readily draw on. It also assumes that students who successfully complete the assignment will be able to transfer their success at this piecemeal project to other work of their own. White's own thunderstorm description, however, is not prefigured in earlier works or drawn upon in later writing; it is generated solely to serve that essay.

Similarly, since the term "informal essay" is only introduced in the same editors' headnote to "One More to the Lake" and explained as essays that often "start with an account of everyday happenings but lead to more general thoughts or reflections . . . [and] have a light touch and a leisurely pace but nevertheless lead into a serious discussion of human life" (487), there is considerable challenge in an assignment such as the following: "Write an informal essay about a place, person, or event from the past whose memory continues to play a role in your thoughts or in your life" (Guth 493). How does the student interpret "an informal essay," as a specific literary form or a general description? How does the student dredge up a "place, person, or event from the past whose memory continues to play a role in [his or her] thoughts or . . . life?" Does the student really want to share that information? What does "play a role" mean to the student writer? Such assignments have a number of assumptions underlying them that the student might not share.

The most common "suggestion for writing" is one calling for the students' own versions of "Once More to the Lake", recalling places they've visited twice, describing family vacation spots, identifying moments when they were "forced to think about mortality" (Nadell 108) or events "that marked [their] moving into adulthood" (Murray 353). Here the writing process is inverted, beginning with a description of the end product to be produced rather than with the writer's own experience. For example, one assignment instructs the student:

> Give new meaning to an everyday event, as does E. B. White in "Once More to the Lake." Choose something that happened to you or that you participated in--at home, among friends, or on campus. By providing ample detail, as does E. B. White, you can make the familiar seem new and revealing. (Winterowd 312)

Rather than follow White's own process of recording an experience that has personal meaning for himself, and which perhaps consequently gave new meaning to an everyday event to others, students are asked to find something to give new meaning to--a challenge to the student far greater than that White himself faced.

Or consider this assignment:

> Think of a favorite childhood vacation place and describe making a return visit now, bringing with you a younger brother, sister, son, daughter, or friend. The return visit may be either real or imagined, but be sure to describe the differences you observe and to comment on their significance both to you and to the person you have brought with you. (Wyrick 205)

White's experience, of course, was not imaginary, not just an exercise in writing, not an occasion to "pretend" he was living through an experience and to "make up" differences he can "imagine" observing--how do you comment on imaginary significances to imaginary persons on an imaginary trip and still be writing non-fiction? The circumstances of such assignments often contradict the ends they hope to achieve; the best the student can hope for is to write a good imaginary essay.

Apparatuses

Although some readers simply try to engage the student in dialogue about the readings or suggest "lines of inquiry," as one text puts it, most of the anthologies have a study apparatus that attempts to lead the student to a certain understanding of the work. (See Table 4.)

Table 4. Apparatuses

Bedford Reader	Meaning, Strategies, Language
Compact Reader	Meaning, Purpose/Audience, Method/Structure, Language
Critical Reader	Reading Critically
Dolphin Reader	None
Eight Modern Essayists	None in Text
Essay 2	Using Dictionary, Writer's Agenda
Essay Connection	Content, Strategies, Language
Harvest Reader	Questions for Reading and Writing
In Depth	Lines of Inquiry: Structure, Content, Reminiscence
Inquiring Reader	Problems (with answer space) in exercises
Invention & Design	Content; Invention/Design/Style

Lexington Reader	Content Questions; Recommended Strategies
Macmillan Reader	Close Reading, Writer's Craft, Further Thought
Modern American Prose	Ideas, Words
Norton Sampler	None
Outlooks and Insights	On Essay, Explorations
Prentice Hall Reader	Subject / Purpose, Strategy / Audience, Vocabulary / Style
Read to Write	Writer's Notes for 2nd Reading, Discussion
Readings for Writers	Vocabulary, Facts, Strategies, Issues
Responsible Reader	Words, Thinking
Rinehart Reader	Topics for Writing / Discussion
Short Model Essays	None
Themes and Variations	Content questions
Writer's Reader	Considerations (of strategy, style)

The apparatus suggests the way the editors have perceived their audience and the purpose to which they are putting the readings. Since some books see their goal as the training of educated readers, they focus on such low-level reading skills as vocabulary and dictionary exercises--*Essay2* sends students to the dictionary for words like "gunwale," "helgramite," and "flywheel" and asks them to explain how words like "placidity," "remote," "indelible," and "languid" "cluster around or relate to the central theme of this essay" (Guth 492); *The Responsible Reader* asks students to explain the way certain words ("dragonfly," "cultist," "fade-proof") "depend on [their] context for strength" (Ziff 97). Others seem to assume experience in close reading and stylistic analysis, sending the students in search of evidence of diction, tone, metaphors, images, figurative language, parallelism, and repetition, engaging composition students in the same kinds of literary analysis found in introductory literature anthologies.

Textual analysis seems to be assumed to lead to interpretation of the author's intentions, motives, and strategies. For example, a number of the texts ask the student reader to explain the meaning of White's essay, but the texts each have their own interpretations of its main idea or theme or thesis. One editor who asks that question in the apparatus of the anthology answers it in the instructor's manual (for the instructor, not the student) by claiming

> the main idea of the essay is that even as we relive cherished experiences of childhood and see our behavior and feelings repeated in the next generation, we cannot stop or reverse time to escape our own mortality. (Aaron, *Instructor's* 16)

It is hard to imagine student readers approximating that kind of definition of the main idea as a universal experience, but several texts offer similar definitions. Another editor writes, "This essay touches on a universal human feeling--the sensation that time is slipping by, that our lives are spinning out their allotted spans every moment of the day" (Nadell 108), roughly the equivalent to the previous statement.

However, other questions are more idiosyncratic. How can a student answer a question like the following: "In what sense is White's essay a *parable*? What does he gain by presenting his "thesis" in this way rather than directly?" (Winterowd 311), a question that assumes (alone in twenty-four texts) that the essay is a parable? What do you suppose the editor had in mind who asked: "In what part of his body did White feel the chill of death? In the context of this essay, why is this such an appropriate place?" (McCuen 401) or "When do people first become aware of their own mortality? What events or phases of life heighten this feeling?" (Nadell 108) or "Why is his son never described?" (Miller 98) or "What assumptions does White make about his audience?" (Miller 98). A number of hidden assumptions about writing, symbolism, and White's life are lurking in these questions. In addition to the customary demand to read the author's mind, the student must also be able to read the editor's mind.

It is small wonder then that, when asked about the apparatuses accompanying their reprinted essays, Richard Selzer once claimed, "I read those questions and collapse in mad laughter" and Gretel Ehrlich said, "When those anthologies come in, we get drunk and ask each other the discussion questions, laughing like hell." It is not only that, as X. J. Kennedy has observed, "the fallacy is in thinking that the author knows what he means," but also that there is a fallacy in thinking that the editors can lead students to the meaning (Ehrlich).

In texts which supply study questions too little seems to be made of the vagaries of reader response. For example, Donald Murray tells of a student who, after reading the essay, "violently complained" that White was "too New Yorkish, too WASPish, too Eastern" and who subsequently led Murray to conclude that

> perhaps we should read White as an ethnic writer and appreciate the qualities of his upper-middle-class, suburban-New York, East-Coast, white, Protestant background. They should not be seen, as they were for too long, as the model for us all, but as an interesting--and often imprisoning--way of life." (353)

Murray seems rather to have missed the point of his student's idiosyncratic reading of the essay--whatever the essay may be about, it hardly seems like evidence of an "imprisoning way of life" and Murray's ethnic pigeonholing distances the reader from the possibilities of connecting to it. Rather, the student's response illustrates the difficulty that arises when we do not expect readers to bring a set of preconceptions to their reading and when we are not provided with a means to deal with them in all their variousness; instead we fall back on two less attractive alternatives, either insisting that they conform to the editor's preconceptions or acquiescing to their (perhaps equally) idiosyncratic reading as a legitimate form of response for everyone.

The editor's own response determines the nature of the questions asked and the answers expected. Often the questions reveal the degree to which the editor is dependent upon her own explication of the text rather than a sufficient background in it. For example, one editor asks, "Why does White return to the lake in Maine he had visited as a child? Why do you think he has *waited to revisit it until he has a young son to bring along* (my emphasis) ?" (Nadell 107). Clearly the editor has a specific answer in mind, one that ties in with her interpretation of the text. In terms of simply decoding the essay, the answer to the first question is one that White gives in its opening paragraph: that "the restlessness of the tides and the fearful cold of the sea water and the incessant wind that blows across the afternoon and into the evening make me wish for the placidity of a lake in the woods"

(*Essays*197). But the answer to the second question seems not to be because his son "had never had any fresh water up his nose" (197). In other words, the editor has begun to see the essay as a contrivance, an artifice with little relation to experience.

Similarly another editor asks: "Why do you imagine White returned to the lake with his son rather than taking a friend along or even going alone? . . . *What purpose does his son's presence serve* (my emphasis)?" (Ziff 97). She seems to assume that the son's presence is not an historical fact but merely a literary device by which White can pull off this exercise in "remembering" or "self-discovery," the classifications she gives the essay. In either case, clearly the questions direct the student toward the concerns and the interpretation of the individual editor rather than toward a universal agreement about the essay's "meaning" among editors or toward a reliable strategy the student might use with similar essays.

Providing a Context

Often in these texts the attempts to inductively lead the student reader to discover the "strategies," "methods," "techniques," or "purposes" of a specific text seem to draw on imaginative interpretations of authorial intention--in other words, on current-traditional models of textual analysis. As Kathleen Welch has complained, "published texts show us on every page, with every justified margin, that writing requires no context. . . that famous writers do not set up their work and that they do not think about context" (273). The strategies and methods that emerge in textual analysis are treated as readily adaptable, almost fool-proof techniques and ignore the evidence that, as Laurence Behrens has observed, "E. B. White's meditations on democracy, on humor, on progress and change . . . draw on years of experience, of absorption of reading and sense impressions, of professional training and discipline" (565). The sense of a context for "Once More to the Lake" is one of the most obvious omissions in the readers I surveyed.

As the evidence of White's own collection of letters and of Scott Elledge's biography make apparent, White began going to the Belgrade Lakes resort in 1904, when he was five years old, and returned to it often throughout his life. He wrote about it in the journal he kept as a child, in the self-published "travel brochure" he wrote for a friend in 1914, and in letters to Harold Ross in 1927, to his older brother Stanley White in 1935 or 1936, and to his wife Katharine on July 24, 1941, during the trip that produced the essay. At the time of the trip White was 42 years old and his son Joel was 10. White was then living on a salt-water farm on the coast of Maine and writing a monthly department for *Harper's Magazine* entitled "One Man's Meat" in which he often explored personal and timely experiences. In none of those columns, which eventually included "Once More to the Lake," nor in any of his literary writing does he *ever* mention his son or his wife by name. "Once More to the Lake" was written within weeks of the Belgrade Lakes trip with Joe, in order to meet his column's August 1941 deadline; it appeared in *Harper's* two months later, on schedule, in October 1941 and was reprinted in White's hardcover collection, *One Man's Meat* in 1942. The same version appears in *The Essays of E. B. White*, published in 1977, from which all but one of the anthologies surveyed reprints it.

The range of information provided about White and the composition of "Once More to the Lake" varies markedly among these anthologies. (See Table 5.)

Table 5. Contextual Materials

Title	Headnote Materials
Bedford Reader	Biographic-bibliographic; intro to essay
Compact Reader	Biographic, intro to essay
Critical Reader	Biographic
Dolphin Reader	None
Eight Modern Essayists	Biographic/bibliographic; introduction
Essay 2	Biographic/generic (informal essay); reading guide
Essay Connection	Biographic, author's philosophy, intro to essay
Harvest Reader	Biographic, introduction
In Depth	Biographic/bibliographic/critical introduction
Inquiring Reader	Quote from text; critical headnote

Invention & Design	Introduction to essay
Lexington Reader	Interpretation
Macmillan Reader	Biographic/bibliographic; intro to essay
Modern American Prose	Introduction on career, style, strategies
Norton Sampler	Biographic/bibliographic, intro to essay
Outlooks and Insights	Bibliographic, introduction
Prentice Hall Reader	Biographic/bibliographic, intro to essay
Read to Write	Critical introduction
Readings for Writers	Biographic/bibliographic, intro to essay
Responsible Reader	Biographic, intro to essay
Rinehart Reader	biographic/bibliographic
Short Model Essays	Biographic/bibliographic, intro
Themes and Variations	Biographic, generic (familiar essay)
Writer's Reader	Biographic/bibliographic

The most thorough introductions are in collections organized around authors; *In Depth*, for example, has a four-page overview of White's writing, and *Modern American Prose* has a three-page introduction--since they are introducing several selections they are not necessarily focused solely on this essay, but they tend to give the reader a more thorough background on White than the other anthologies. In most other cases headnotes tend to be biographical and bibliographical, frequently with some sort of critical evaluation of the essay or White's career or an introduction to the essay itself. The details vary greatly but generally the headnotes say little about the circumstances of White's column and some never mention either the magazine or the original book collection. Since the essay is almost always reprinted from *The Essays of E. B. White* (1977), the dateline "August 1941" (sometimes printed as part of the title) usually indicates when the essay was written.

Most of the headnotes mention White's books for children or his career at *The New Yorker* but are generally sketchy about his career as an essayist. *Readings for Writers* claims "he wrote a number of essays for the section called 'The Talk of the Town' in *The New Yorker*. Some of these essays have been collected in *The Wild Flag*" and mentions such other works as *Is Sex Necessary?* and *Here is New York* (McCuen 394) while ignoring *Essays*; *The Second Tree from the Corner*, and *The Points of My Compass*, where White collected

the kind of writing they are reprinting. (*Wild Flag* is a collection of editorials; *Is Sex Necessary?* a humorous collaboration with James Thurber). Such odd emphases suggest that the titles cited have been selected at random. *The Rinehart Reader* shows even less familiarity with White's work, insisting that White not only revised but also retitled William Strunk's *The Little Book* as *The Elements of Style* (the title it always had), an odd and embarrassing piece of misinformation.

If the headnotes are only occasionally more than perfunctory, the texts themselves provide little context for the process of White's writing. Only a third of the readers surveyed have additional material by White as well as the "Lake" essay. (See Table 6.)

Table 6. Additional Material by the Author

Title	Additional Material
Bedford Reader	Further Reading--A Boy I Knew, Death of Pig
Compact Reader	None
Critical Reader	None
Dolphin Reader	Twins (Nature/Civilization Section); Calculating Machine (Writing Section); multiple drafts of moon comment (introduction)
Eight Modern Essayists	Death of a Pig, The Ring of Time (excerpt), On a Florida Key, The Essayist(excerpt)
Essay 2	None
Essay Connection	None
Harvest Reader	None
In Depth	The Ring of Time, The Age of Dust, A Slight Sound at Evening, The Essayist
Inquiring Reader	None
Invention & Design	None
Lexington Reader	Letters (introduction), Death of a Pig (Humor), {Eudora Welty on *Charlotte's Web* (Criticism)}
Macmillan Reader	None
Modern American Prose	The Essayist, Letter from the East, Goodbye to 48th Street, The Ring of Time
Norton Sampler	Letter on Belgrade Lake from White
Outlooks and Insights	None
Prentice Hall Reader	None
Read to Write	None
Readings for Writers	None

Responsible Reader	None
Rinehart Reader	Education, The Three New Yorks
Short Model Essays	None
Themes and Variations	None
Writer's Reader	None

Of those eight, only three author-centered readers collect those pieces in one grouping; four of the others scatter additional essays in other categories and one simply follows the essay with an excerpt from a letter. Some of the additional pieces are themselves excerpts rather than entire essays--"The Ring of Time" is reprinted whole in only one of eight readers in which it appears; "Three NYs" is an excerpt from *Here is New York*. One reader cites and reprints White's letter to Stanley White about the lake in a section on the writing process, 200 pages before the actual essay (Bloom *Lexington*). Only one of the eight includes drafts of a text White carried through the composing process, a piece written twenty years later, after White retired and his composing process changed; it is offered as a general model of the composing process (Hunt 6-10).

Rationales

Many of the text features noted are influenced by the rationales behind the readers themselves, the goals their editors set out to achieve; these determine the focus of the apparatus, the design of the structure, the nature of the suggestions for writing. The premises upon which these texts are constructed vary widely, from the desire to teach critical reading to the desire to teach the essay as a literary form, yet the rationales they present to the students generally tend to echo one another. As one editor summarized them, "You read in a writing course for three purposes. First, readings are a source of information . . . Second, readings offer a perspective on a particular subject . . . [and] can serve as catalysts or stimuli to provoke writing . . . finally, readings offer models to a writer; they show you how another writer dealt with a particular subject" (Miller 1).

The argument for using the text as a source of reading is best represented by claims that "writing develops from reading: people who read effectively and widely will either write well already or be *able to learn* to write well" (Winterowd 1) and that reading "stocks the mind with information, understanding, examples, and illustrations" and "when you have a well-stocked mental warehouse, you tell truths, even small and ordinary truths" (Kennedy 2). The belief that reading serves as a stimulus for writing leads one editor to reassure students that "you will not be expected to duplicate these examples, but to mine them for ideas and inspirations that will help you to clarify your own thoughts and feelings for expression in prose" (Taylor ix); another asserts that "reading others' ideas can introduce you to new information, open your mind to new associations, give you new perspectives on your own experience . . . [it] reveals subjects for writing" (Aaron 1). Faith in the efficacy of models inspires one editor to testify that "the experience of carefully reading an excellent writer, noticing not only what the writer has to say but also the quality of its saying, rubs off (if you are patient and perceptive) on your own writing" (Kennedy 2); another claims, "Each essay offers proven rhetorical designs that you can store away in your 'model-chamber,' ready at hand whenever you have a verbal edifice to construct" (Cooley 3). The balance among these principal rationales determines the emphasis of the text itself.

However, in actual practice these foci are not the only determinants of the text. One team of editors assert of their anthology:

> The selections will--because of their quality and timeliness--be eminently enjoyable to students and useful to instructors.
>
> Seven short stories have been added to aid those instructors who teach short fiction in their composition courses. The argumentation section has been greatly expanded, and on three topical issues--the death penalty, liberal education, and bilingual education--paired essays present the opposing sides of arguments. Eight writers are represented by two essays each. We have been particularly conscious of

> maintaining a balance between male and female writers: forty percent of the selections in the second edition. . . are by women." (Heffernan vi)

Sorting through the motives behind this kind of selection process--to meet the demands of several different pedagogies, various political positions, and a range of philosophies--the reader may suspect that there is no real book here at all. Given that principle of selection, the place of an essay like "Once More to the Lake" in the student's education as a writer becomes even more problematical.

Once More to the Essay

I began my survey of composition anthologies reprinting "Once More to the Lake" searching for signs of consensus, perhaps naively. While there seems to be considerable agreement about the reasons students should be assigned readings in a composition course--at least among those who edit composition readers and probably among those who assign them--there is little consensus about what kind of reading White's essay is and what students ought to be gaining by reading it and using it as a stimulus to their own writing.

It may be argued that, regardless of the rationale behind the text and the apparatus that supports it, the teacher has the freedom to ignore all that and simply use the essay to meet his own goals in the course. No doubt many teachers do exactly that, and one of the values of such anthologies is the wealth of good reading and good writing they offer. But because these texts do have so much agreement about their underlying rationale and because they are continually tested against the expectations of the classroom teachers who adopt them--that is, revised to be more marketable to a demographically-specific audience--I assume that a considerable number of teachers do use the organization and study aides in these anthologies as a means of organizing and administering their classes.

There has been a long tradition of doubting the value of anthologies to promote the development of writing skills. James Moffett has objected that models such as "Once More to

the Lake" "merely intimidate some students by implying a competition in which they are bound to lose" (208); like many composition specialists, he has found no evidence of their effectiveness. Greenbaum and Schmeri, objecting to the assumption that, "if a student reads and is exposed to well-written prose, he will, as when exposed to the flu virus, catch a little of it" similarly argued against such rationales, claiming they were "the same theories that produced McGuffey's Eclectic Readers in the last century" (Greenbaum 58). More recently, after surveying the research on the relationship between reading models and composition, Hillocks found that research projects attempting to prove the efficacy of models in composition instruction routinely ended up with statistically insignificant results. The best that Hillocks could say of the connection was that "while the study of models alone has a relatively weak effect on the quality of writing, and while treatments emphasizing procedural knowledge have very strong effects, we know little about the combination of the two" (238) and his research concluded that "although research indicates that emphasis on the presentation of good pieces of writing as models is significantly more useful than the study of grammar . . . treatments which use the study of models almost exclusively are less effective than other available techniques" (249). In the texts in this survey, the attention to published essays as part of a study of writing procedures is minimal; only Donald Murray's *Read to Write* can be said to use the readings to exemplify aspects of composing processes. Rather my survey supports Kathleen Welch's observation: "Of the hundreds of pounds of freshman writing books produced each year, few are constructed with any overt indication that composition theory has ever existed" (269).

The attempt to teach critical reading may be valuable for readers; the attempt to apply literary approaches to non-fiction prose may be worthwhile for young literary scholars and critics; the attempt to provide a text for a course in the essay may be attractive; but none of these attempts do very well at getting at the center of the composition course–the student's own writing. If this sample is indicative, most composition anthologies do a disservice to the texts and authors they reprint by often misrepresenting or undervaluing them, and even

those who do justice to the texts or the authors still provide little help for the potential writer, despite all the claims of teaching students to read with "the writer's eye" or to discern composing strategies through textual analysis. Only a handful allow the student to apprentice herself to a specific writer, only a handful allow the student to approach the readings as a real reader might, only a handful present a context that helps the student understand the process by which that exemplary work came into being; all model analysis of the published text instead the process that leads to the text, and few offer the possibility that real writing--the kind that produced "Once More to the Lake" in the first place--will come out of the students.

Clearly my analysis of this data is influenced by *my assumptions* about what happens in the learning of writing, but composition teachers need to recognize that being able to use these texts (rather than contravene them) requires acceptance of--or at the least comfort with--the assumptions that govern their design and their interaction with students. To do that they will have to be willing to examine those assumptions before adopting the book. As Dennis Rygiel has pointed out, "the use of nonfiction in a composition course is not automatically a good; the decisive factor is what teachers have students do with the prose and how they have them do it" (392). Composition instructors ought to consider just how certain composition readers can help produce real writing in the classroom before they provide room in their syllabi for going, once more, to the essay.

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