

Printable Worksheets and Activities

Supplement to

A Call to Creativity

Writing, Reading, and Inspiring Students
in an Age of Standardization

Luke Reynolds



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The Boston Photograph

ON JULY 22, 1975, Stanley J. Forman was working in the newsroom of the *Boston Herald American* newspaper when a police scanner picked up an emergency: "Fire on Marlborough Street!" Forman rushed to the scene, where multiple fire crews were battling an intense blaze. There was a distress call for a ladder team to the rear of the building to help a stranded woman and child. Forman followed.

Climbing atop the fire truck for a better view, Forman instinctively began covering the events before him. As firemen on the scene focused on their work, Forman's attention was directed to a young woman, Diana Bryant, and a very young girl, Tiare Jones. Both were seeking help from a fireman, Bob O'Neil, located on the roof directly above them. O'Neil moved to the fire escape and motioned for the truck's ladder to be brought to them. The flames came closer and closer to the fire escape as Forman continued to shoot.

Then, at the very instant the ladder reached the trio, the fire escape gave way. O'Neil clung to the ladder, but Bryant and Jones fell helplessly. Forman snapped a last picture before turning away, knowing the bodies were falling to the ground. Diana Bryant was pronounced dead at the scene. The young girl lived. Despite a heroic effort, O'Neil knew he had been just seconds away from saving the lives of both. Forman's work captured a vivid scene where mere seconds had meant life or death.

Text excerpted from http://alt.tnt.tv/specials/moi/photo_boston.html

To see the photographs, visit <http://www.stanleyformanphotos.com/galleryfirescape.html>

Name _____

Date _____

Members of My Group _____

Overview

You and the other three members of your group are no longer students. The four of you are now the editorial board for the *Boston Herald American*. Stanley Forman, a staff photographer, walks into your board meeting, and he hands you the photos of what he has captured.

You have 25 minutes to make a decision: Will you print the photos or not? The paper needs to be sent to press in the next hour, so this time limit is essential. As you discuss what decision you will make, be sure to think about all of the consequences. Here are some questions to ask as you talk within your group:

- What is the purpose of your newspaper?
- What do the readers of your newspaper want to see/read about?
- What are the moral and ethical standards of your newspaper?
- What messages will you send by choosing to print or not print the photos?

Within your groups, be honest with your ideas and opinions. Each group member should have a half-page of his or her own thoughts along with notes on what other group members share. After 25 minutes, you will stand as a group and notify the rest of the staff at the *Boston Herald American* of your decision, as well as address any problems or questions that the rest of the staff has. (Use the rest of this page for your notes.)

The Historical Decision Made by the *Boston Herald American* and Its Consequences

The editorial board at the *Boston Herald American* chose to print three of the pictures that Stanley Forman took that day. Afterward, there was indeed outrage by some of the paper's readership. Letters-to-the-editor poured in saying the decision was awful. These photos showed death as it was in the midst of happening, and this kind of graphic depiction was seen by some as a moral trespass.

However, others thought the photos delivered the honest news and showed what really happened. Also, the photos of the dilapidated fire escape giving way became powerful proof for the public of the bad fire safety standards in lower-income housing areas in the city of Boston.

The following year, Forman's sequence of photos from the tragic event garnered him the 1976 Pulitzer Prize in Spot News Photography.

Do you think the historical results vindicated Forman's shooting of the photos and the newspaper's decision to print them? Why or why not?

Imagine that you are Tiare Jones. How do you feel growing up knowing these photos capturing your mother's death have been published for all to see?

Name _____

Date _____

Due: _____

Love and Marriage?

After reading “What I Wish I Had Known About Marriage” by Kristin Armstrong, think carefully about the experiences and advice she shares. Write a one-page response to the following questions:

What is the purpose of marriage?

Do you think you will marry?

Before you start your page, consider and respond to these helpful additional questions, which may unlock some of your thinking. Try to write what first comes to mind rather than what you think you should write.

Do you think marriage is always beneficial for both partners?

Would you like to marry when you are young or older?

What would you say are the essential elements of a marriage?

Do you think that we—as a culture—hold on too tightly to our “Cinderella stories”?

Why do so many people (estimated at 50%) get divorced?

What are the reasons for which a couple should decide to marry?

When do you think a couple should call it quits before the wedding date arrives?

Do you see yourself happily married one day because of intense passion, similar interests, or other things?

Name _____

Date _____

Considering Janie, Considering You, Considering Love

Reflecting on *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

What expectations do you have for a love relationship?

What are Janie's expectations for love?

What is something that has gone wrong with one or more of your relationships?

What is wrong with Logan Killicks?

How would you describe the characteristics of a *Dud*?

Where do your expectations come from in terms of relationships? Janie's?

Listen to Mr. Reynolds's story of love and how he decided to risk being vulnerable with the woman to whom he proposed. The following poem, by W. B. Yeats, comes into play. Be ready for it. Then see if Mr. R. recites it without any mistakes.

Question to think about as you listen: What does it mean to love someone?

When You Are Old

by William Butler Yeats (1865–1939)

When you are old and gray and full of sleep
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;

How many loved your moments of glad grace,
And loved your beauty with love false or true;
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,
And loved the sorrows of your changing face.

And bending down beside the glowing bars,
Murmur, a little sadly, how love fled
And paced upon the mountains overhead,
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

Something Left to Love?

A Raisin in the Sun and Making Words Matter

Directions

Below, find Mama's speech to Beneatha after her daughter roars that Walter is no good and that she cannot love him—*there is nothing left to love!* Walter has decided to sell the house back to Lindner and is on the verge of giving up on dreams and hope.

Go through the speech, and underline and circle lines that move you. Write notes about yourself, people you know, and life problems and joys in the margins.

After you read and annotate (mark up) the speech, think about a person to whom or about whom you could make a speech like this. Who in your life needs to know that you love them and will not give up on them—the way Mama won't give up on Walter? On a separate sheet, write your own version of Mama's speech referencing the person on your mind and in your heart.

I. Mama's Speech

There is always something left to love.
Have you cried for that boy today?
Not for yourself and the family
because we lost the money.
I mean for him.
And what he's gone through.
And God help him.
God help him, what it's done to him.
Child, when do you think is the time
to love somebody the most?
When he's done good and made things
easy for everybody?
That ain't the time at all.
It's when he's at his lowest . . .
. . . and he can't believe in himself
because the world's whipped him so!
When you starts measuring somebody . . .
. . . measure him right, child.
Measure him right.
You make sure that
you done taken into account . . .
. . . the hills and the valleys
he's come through . . .
. . . to get to wherever he is. (Hansberry, p. 135)

Paideia (or Socratic) Seminar

"I prefer nothing, unless it is true." —Socrates

The Paideia Seminar is based upon a theory of learning practiced by Socrates. His mode of education consisted of talking with people who were either travelers to or citizens of Greece in a way that forced them to think and rethink their own ideas or initial understandings of something. Many people hated him for this because powerful leaders would often end up looking foolish when Socrates was through with them.

Today, we will have our first Socratic Seminar. This is the way it works:

- *The "teacher" shuts up.* Socrates believed that teaching is not a matter of lectures, or of passing information from one body to another. Instead, he believed that genuine knowledge is already *inside* the soul of a person. The teacher's job, then, was to ask the right questions to call it forth. A story about the mythic gods propounds this point.
- *The questions are presented.* Below, you'll see three questions. My job will be to facilitate your discussion of these questions. Each person must respond at some point to one of the questions. The idea is to get the ball rolling, during which time people can respond to another's comments *and* to the questions. Respond to one question fully before moving on to the next.
- *Textual support is a must.* In the Socratic Seminar, reasons must be given for your ideas. If you assert something, you must back it up with a line or passage from the story. As you present your point, you must alert others to the line or passage you are using, and then read it aloud.
- *At the close, everyone notes where he or she stands.* The questions we deal with are pointed ones, and by the end of the class, the Socratic Seminar allows for those who want to change their position.
- *Listening is a MUST.* In order to have a good seminar, each member must listen to the comments of others. When you address someone's remark, refer to them by name and briefly restate their comment and then your addition to it.

Socratic Seminar

The Skin I'm In by Sharon G. Flake

As we discussed in class, a Socratic Seminar is a forum where there is no right answer—however, your ideas must be backed up by evidence from the text, your own experience, or connections to other texts or events.

Socrates believed that by asking questions and thinking out loud in the context of a community, people could get closer to what is true. Remember that your grade for this Socratic Seminar depends on your preparation (notes, talking points) and what you share in our discussion.

Here are the three questions we'll discuss in our Socratic Seminar. For each question, on a separate sheet, you should write:

- your ideas about the question
- lines from the book (with their page numbers) that back up your ideas
- other connections, events, or experiences

Be SURE to include all three of the above requirements before our discussion!

1. What do you think Maleeka should do about Char and John-John?
2. Agree or disagree with the following statement: Students should always talk to teachers when they are being bullied or hurt.
3. Why do many people make fun of what is different from them?

The Marriage of Passion and Purpose

(Yes! In a Critical-Analytical Thesis Essay! Hold the Phone!)

You have written a thesis statement, which you will use to argue passionately for your case in *The Great Gatsby*. Granted, you are not Tom Cruise or Demi Moore. (Or are you? I checked my class list very carefully, just on the notion that Tom Cruise might sign up for my course. But I was pretty sure I didn't see his name. In fact, now that I think about it carefully and seriously, I am sure he is not in this course.) So, having established that PEARL OF TRUTH (here used to represent the phrase "pearl of wisdom"), I can now move forward: You can be *like* Tom Cruise's character in *A Few Good Men*.

Argue passionately for what you believe about the ideas we discussed from the novel.

So that's the desired outcome, the goal, the promised land, the finish line, the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, the ice cold drink of water after a long race, the "good-night sweetheart" of every proverbial high school classroom, the victory.

But in Order to Get There . . .

The essays must have evidence! (Insert loud battle cry here—image: Mel Gibson and his slew of soldiers fighting to free Scotland from the tyranny of injustice. Our battle is for evidence. I will bring war paint tomorrow.) Imagine if Tom Cruise's character in *A Few Good Men* had simply stated his opinion—nothing much would have come of it. His evidence proved the case. In our essays, we must choose good evidence to support our thesis statements.

With the worksheet provided, you will gather six quotes that may be used to *prove your thesis*. Explore the novel and find six quotes and record them on the worksheet. After each quote, include the page number in parentheses, followed by a period after the closing parenthesis (MLA format).

Essay Theme (What idea does your thesis focus on?):

My Thesis Statement:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

My Ideal Country

A Project in Conjunction with *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* by Livia Bitton-Jackson

Overview

In her Holocaust memoir, Livia Bitton-Jackson describes the way in which she and other Jewish people were subjected to gruesome treatment at the hands of Nazi soldiers in a country where injustice, discrimination, and fear had become the way of the world with Hitler in charge.

Now, imagine YOU are in charge of a country and your mission is to create a society that is the complete opposite. In other words, your goal is to craft a country where the laws, the people, the government—anything that is important to a functioning country—are as ideal and as fair as possible. Your mission is to create YOUR IDEAL COUNTRY.

Necessary Components of the Project

This is a big task. In order to make your mission clearer, below are the key requirements and due dates for the different parts of the project:

- *Write at least 10 laws that will govern your society.* Each law must be at least two complete sentences long, and it must be clearly explained and work to make your society more just and more ideal. Put your 10 laws on a separate page, and entitle them your country's **BILL OF RIGHTS**.
- *Choose and create all of the following:* (1) A name for your country, along with a five-sentence paragraph explaining why you chose that particular name and how it relates to the culture of your country. (2) Decide on a population for your country (how many people live there?); for a reference point, Germany had a population of 55 million people at the time of the Holocaust. (3) Create a map of your country, in color, that shows how big it is, what bodies of water are in or near it, what types of land there are within your country, and any other important facts.
- *What type of government will your country have?* Will there be a king or a queen? Will there be a legislature, as in America? Explain how your country will be governed on a separate sheet of paper; write at least two paragraphs.
- *What will the system of education be like in your country?* Will all children be required to go to school? If so, for how long? How many days of the year? Why? What subjects will students be required to study? Will there be college education? What will the teachers be like? Describe an average school day for an average student in your country. This section should be at least two full pages long.

- *What kinds of jobs will exist in your country?* List 15 different jobs that your country will need, and provide the salary for each job. For instance, in your ideal society—the country you create—will a baseball player make \$30,000 while a social worker makes \$200,000? Or vice versa? After listing the 15 jobs and the salary for each, write a paragraph describing why you made these choices at the bottom of this page.
- *What will your country's system of crime and punishment be like?* What will happen to people who break the 10 laws in your Bill of Rights? Write one page describing this process.
- *Who will be honored and revered in your country?* Write one page explaining your ideas.
- *Write a **Mission Statement** for your country.* This will be somewhat like the Declaration of Independence for America. Your **Mission Statement** will include: why your country is the (or at least your) ideal society; the values your country respects and strives toward; an example of how your country is a place of justice and equality (you can make up a story, inventing citizens in your country and using them as examples); anything else you want to include. This **Mission Statement** will be two pages long.

We will present our Ideal Countries in class during the week of _____. You will have a lot of time in class to work on your ideal countries, as we read *I Have Lived . . .* at home. I can't wait to see your countries! Be creative, break out of "The Cave," and be specific, clear, and honest in your work!

Good luck!

I Am Because

Essay on Self and Society

Due: _____

Overview

Think about what in society has influenced who you are at this very moment: Commercials? Friends? The way your parents treat each other? The absence of parents? Teachers? Which decisions can you confidently say are completely your own, and which decisions arise from the words, advice, demands, persuasions, or examples of others?

Specifics

This essay assignment asks you to dig deep into your own formation. How did you become the person that you are right now? Before writing your essay, take time to consider what messages have impacted your life and where these messages have come from. Also, consider moments in your life when you felt especially afraid, excited, jealous, ecstatic, or confused. Do moments of extreme emotion double as a formative crossroads?

Outline for Essay

This piece should be **three full pages, double-spaced**. It can be no longer and no shorter. For some of us, this may mean revising our words down to the barest essentials; for others of us, it may mean working hard to elaborate the page and a half we've been able to etch.

Begin by discussing your present state: How would you define yourself right now (consider gender, place, work, abilities, relationships, passions, non-negotiables)?

Then transition into making a *claim* about your formation. For example: I have resisted the influences of my society to become the person I **wanted** to become. Or perhaps: I can see how my identity has often been molded by the way my society has influenced me. Be original and honest with your claim.

Next, support your claim by using specifics—exactly *what* influences have been so important in shaping who you are, **or**, exactly *what* influences have you been able to resist? Has your resistance become an influence in itself?

Finally, discuss the influences in your life using ETHOS, PATHOS, and LOGOS. For each influence you mention, show why you would categorize it as an influence through ETHOS (someone or something with credibility, e.g., an authority figure, a hero, etc.), PATHOS (the influence appealed to your emotion—making you laugh, cry, desire, feel inadequate, etc.), or LOGOS (how the influence seemed to make logical sense to you, etc.). **Be sure to mention these terms TWICE EACH as you write your essay!**

Audience and Grading

For this essay, I am your audience. I hope you will be honest and that you'll be able to do some excavating of your past. My goals for you in writing this piece are twofold:

1. You will gain a clearer understanding of how ethos, pathos, and logos function in yourselves and in our society on multiple levels—including an understanding of how many pressures are at work to try to persuade us to think and behave in certain ways.
2. You will be able to step outside of the immediate cries for your attention to reflect on who you are, the decisions you have made, and how much society has informed those decisions.

Since speaking with conviction demands that writing be clear, meaningful, and powerful, I will be grading your work based on the questions below:

1. Is the essay COMPLETELY FREE of any errors in grammar, spelling, and punctuation?
2. Does the essay practice all the principles of writing on the handout from class?
3. Does the essay use the terms ETHOS, PATHOS, and LOGOS at least TWO TIMES (each)?
4. Does the essay explain how different influences in society use ethos, pathos, and logos?
5. Is the essay authentic (honest, engaging, and incorporating a clear voice)?
6. Is the essay stapled?

If the answers to ALL of the above questions are YES, then the essay will receive a grade of A+. If the answers to 5 of the 6 questions are YES, then the paper will receive a B+. If the answers to 4 of the 6 questions are YES, then the paper will receive a C+.

3 of 6 = C-
2 of 6 = D+

1 of 6 = D-
0 of 6 = F

Encouragements

You have a voice unlike any other. The words you share become your trademark, your way of seeing the world around you—making meaning that matters to you and to those who read your words. When you write an essay, you engage in an exercise of speaking with conviction. I will treat your words as sacred things; I will read them carefully, and I am honored to receive them. I believe that what you have to share is worthwhile, and I will treat it with respect, honesty, and engage with you in conversation so that we both might learn.

Do You Live Like a Crab?

Overview

Fishermen say that when they catch crabs, they can keep them in buckets without any coverings at all! When asked why they don't worry about the crabs escaping by clawing their way up the sides to freedom, the fishermen usually reply that the other crabs simply pull their peers right back down into the bucket. In other words, if most of the crabs see that another crab is making its way up the side of the bucket, they'll claw at this crab until it falls back into captivity.

Theme Statement

The majority of crabs will not let another crab escape to freedom, life, and peace if they can't have it or do it themselves.

Connection

In school—and especially in the 7th grade—it is often not “cool” to look smart, to act like you know something, or show that your ideas are strong. Sometimes your classmates will be like those crabs in the bottom of the bucket, and they will try to pull you back down because you are succeeding and because you are working hard to gain freedom, peace, and growth!

Your Mission

In your own words, and with as much honesty as possible, explain how the above metaphor works in your own life. Give at least three different examples of how you see this playing out (or, if you don't see it, offer three examples of why you think you *don't* see this idea playing out in your own life).

Use the questions below to help your thinking, and write your response on white-lined paper and then staple it to the back of this sheet and hand it in. Be sure to include your name and the date!

Guiding Questions

- Who in your life tries to pull you back down when you have success?
- Where do you feel the most pressure to remain at the bottom of the bucket?
- Have you ever climbed out of the bucket, even though others told you to stay?
- What are your dreams—and how will you reach them even if other people want you to fail?

Losing Sight of the Shore

“In order to discover new lands, you must lose sight of the shore for a very long time.”

—André Gide, French writer

So far in your high school career, your writing has dealt mainly with other people’s work. You have constructed critical-analytical essays (which are crucial to learning), made predictions about other writers’ novels and their conclusions, and written letters to characters within works.

Now, you will create your own.

Leaving the shores you are used to may be exciting for some, scary for others, and even relentlessly confusing.

In constructing your novella, you will learn how to write effective sentences, use vivid details, clearly reveal a scene, and create realistic and powerful, funny dialogue.

I will warn you now: At times it is going to seem silly, even stupid, to try to make your characters do something interesting. At other times, you may feel as though you’re banging your head against a wall, and that activity may actually begin to sound appealing. (When this happens, walk away from your novella and drink some orange juice instead of performing said activity. I recommend Minute Maid’s orange/passionfruit mix; it’s got mango in it.)

But I promise you: If you continue to work on it each week, as proposed below, when the end of the year comes around, you will hold in your hands a 30- to 50- page work of which you can be infinitely proud.

Guidelines

- Your final novella must be between 30 and 50 pages (see me if you want to write more): typed, double-spaced, 12-point font (Palatino is a nice book print font).
- Your novella should have a title and a cover page.
- Your novella should be about anything you want it to be about. There are no limits.
- The work must be original, your own, and about something you are interested in.

Due Dates and Work Times

- Each Friday, you will bring in two new pages (typed) of your novella. You should keep your work on the same disk, CD, or one of those little thingeys you insert into a computer that I do not have because they cost too much and therefore I do not know the name of them. Hand in the typed pages to me, and keep the disk yourself.
- Save a second copy of EVERYTHING you write on your school account, too.
- Sometimes we will use a class period to work on our novellas, so always have your disk or a current copy of your novella on your school drive.
- We will use Fridays to **workshop** your new material.
- You may meet with me *at any time* to talk about your artistic decisions or roadblocks.

AAAAAAHHHHHHH!

(Or, Notes on Beginning a Novella)

Brain fart? Your mind playing wall ball with ideas? Lots of hot air and only the window fogging up? Not sure how to start? Not sure if you want to start? Not sure if you *really* want to even be in Mr. Reynolds's class anymore? Not sure if there really is a *whole, entire company* (!) devoted solely to making the plastic tops that come on cups of soda at fast-food joints?

Stop! Cease and desist all worries!

Read this quote: "**Wisdom begins with wonder.**" Socrates said that. Really. I heard him say it just after I watched Napoleon storm Brussels (did he ever storm Brussels or am I just making that up?).

So to start your tale, you've really only got to do one thing: *wonder*.

Wonder about everything. Wonder about why a mom is yelling at her 3-year-old boy at the grocery store. (Ah! There's a start to your novella: "The tired mother held her son's shirt and yelled at him. She was trying to buy lettuce, and her son was trying to be Superman. The desires didn't mix . . ." and take it from there.)

Wonder about who the heck *actually* cleans the classrooms when we all go home. Make up a story about it. Here's a start: "His name was Jonathan, and he had once wanted to be an astronaut. . . ." Then tell his life story and how he ended up as a janitor. Did a true love cheat on him? Did he do it because the money was good?

Wonder about words. Words like *gargantuan* (big), *osmosis* (I still remember the word from AP Biology—why is that? It must be a cool stinking word), *fleeting* (leaving or disappearing quickly), and *soothing* (another cool word).

Start your story with an action: "The dog slowly removed its jaws from the man's inner thigh . . ." and continue. Why did the dog bite the man? What was he doing? Newspapers? Robbery? Trying to train his own dog?

or

"The mailman delivered the letter, and that's when she knew it couldn't be undone. It was there. He would read it . . ." What was the letter about? Was it to her father, whom she had hated all her life for something he did? Was it to a boyfriend, mother, long-lost friend? Use your novel to tell the woman's life story and what the letter is all about.

Start your story with a description of a character. Today, look closely at everyone, everywhere you go: Pick a person you think looks interesting, and just start describing him

or her: “She wore black pants and a black bow on the back of her hair. Her face seemed light, almost as if there was a set of bulbs in a layer behind her skin, lighting up all the pores of her tissue. . . .”

or

Use a quote to start your novella: “What in the hell! How could you say that! Ever since I was a young man, all I ever wanted to do was make good on my dreams, and now you have the nerve to tell me *this?!’*” Keep it going: What has he been told? Who told it to him? Where are the people talking? Are they lovers, friends, married, older, younger? Write the dialogue and let it take you where it will.

or

Start your novel with a setting. Just start describing a place: “The path was all dirt, with the occasional rock lying in the middle of it. Every time you looked forward, the path would seem to just go on forever. The trees around seemed to hang down, as if their heads were lowered, giving way to the fact that they had lost against whoever stormed the woods to make a trail. They were green and . . .” dying? newly born? fresh? Keep it going—keep describing the trail. Then, who is on the trail? Why are they walking it? Are they friends, on a mission, looking for someone?

or

Write a novel using your own life as fodder. What’s going on with you? Who have you been hanging out with? Who have you been interested in? What has made you mad or happy or sad or excited?

Ultimately, the start of your novel may not even be the start you keep! It may be just a way to get to some good stuff. But don’t worry. Just start writing something, anything. Get it down on paper and bring it in on Friday, and we’ll take it from there.

Copy any of the starts I’ve used above. Grab one and just run with it! Take it! It’s yours! Whatever you need to do, do it. Get going.

Keep this in mind as you write:

Writing creatively is about opening up a part of yourself that may have been quieted for a long time. Either because we’ve told you to think critically for so long that you’ve forgotten how to write whatever you want, OR because you’re so busy and anxious with life that you can’t get to that place where you let your soul breathe.

And that’s all writing is, just letting your soul have a nice long walk or run or hike or whatever is most relaxing for you. Before you try to write, put some of your favorite music on, think your best thoughts about who you are and what your dreams are, and then go for it.

If you're having trouble because of boyfriend or girlfriend issues, or lack thereof, or because of anxieties about grades or colleges—write it! Start writing about a character very much in the spot you're in! You are a master of the blank page. Whatever happens, even if what you are putting down is so crappy that you have to laugh, well, then laugh and keep writing. Tell yourself, "No matter what, I'll get two pages." Then, if it helps, make a sound like a pirate and wear a one-eyed patch, and keep writing. It's not like I do anything like that, though. But I will tell you something that I do do. (Hey, I didn't say "doo-doo" there, okay—so don't even think about it like that. I meant it as in "something that I do try—I do do. But one day maybe I will show you a short story that I wrote entitled "The Wad." I wrote it when I was in college, and it's about exactly what you think it's about.)

When I write, I put on my Boston Red Sox hat. I also roll up my sleeves, put on a CD that I like, and sit down at the computer. The hat is a physical thing I do to let myself know, "Alright, buddy, it's time to write." Believe it or not, it helps.

I don't know if any of this helps you, though I hope at least one thing gets you thinking. If you've got a hat, try it. Or try something completely uniquely you—just do something to tell yourself that you're not going to dwell on grades, college, romantic roadblocks, or any other anxious things that may keep your butt plastered to the couch rather than the seat at your computer. Get up and start writing something—anything—and have fun while you do it.

I can't wait to read them!!

On a separate sheet, record a few ideas regarding characters, plots, problems, situations, and voices that interest you.

Mr. Reynolds's

(Things to Look Out for While You Write and Revise or Else He'll Make Lots of Huge Pen Marks All Over Your Page to Alert You to Them)

List of Writing Rules

Save this in a special place, alongside your love letters, pearl earrings, Mickey Mantle baseball card, or lucky shoelace

1. Vary sentence structure: Do not begin three sentences in a row with the same word (*The, The, The . . . I, I, I*).
2. Use specific examples to show rather than tell:
 - dialogue
 - action
 - experiences
 - description
3. Short sentences can be combined. Together, they can create long sentences. These long sentences are still grammatically correct. They are flowing. They prevent the reader from having to halt again and again. Combining short sentences to form long, grammatically correct sentences that flow creates an ease for the reader, preventing him or her from halting again and again.
4. Put commas and periods inside quotation marks, semicolons outside.
5. As you revise your sentences, scan for repeated words and phrases, then give them a kick in the arse. For example, look at this sentence:

Holden's problem is one of fear. The problem is a problem because it is problematic in his life and his family's. The problem with the problem is that it poses a problem for Holden's ability to connect with people.

Using the same phrase again and again is either (a) very annoying and weak writing or (b) a cover-up for a writer who does not know what he or she wants to say.

6. Watch out for comma splice run-ons: These occur when a writer places a comma in between two phrases that can stand alone.

Dogs represent the proverbial passive-aggressive nature, cats represent the manic-depressive nature.

Instead, use a semicolon because both of these phrases can stand alone. Or use a transition word after the comma like *and* or *while*.

Dogs represent the proverbial passive-aggressive nature, and cats represent the manic-depressive nature. (This line uses a transition word.)

Dogs represent the proverbial passive-aggressive nature; cats represent the manic-depressive nature. (This line uses a semicolon.)

7. Now, for real, yo, watch out for all kinds of stuff that's okay for how we might talk, but not for what we write. Word. We got to write with precision, dawg. Keep it tight; keep it clear.
8. When referring to people in a sentence, use *who*, not *that*. For example:
 - Jehoshaphat and Agnes are two people *that* I really like. (This is wrong.)
 - Jehoshaphat and Agnes are two people *that* I really like, a lot. (This is still wrong.)
 - Jehoshaphat and Agnes are two people *whom* I really like because they have the coolest stinking names I've ever heard. (This is correct.)
9. When it comes to good writing, William Faulkner once said, "Kill your darlings." Even the sentences that we fall in love with may be wordy and confusing. Keep everything focused; say only what needs to be said.
10. REVISE!!! Read your piece over many times, and read it OUT LOUD. Speaking the words helps us hear where sentences may be awkward or run-ons.
11. **Always use present tense verbs when writing about literature!**
 - NO: The boy was afraid because the bullies continued beating him up.
 - YES: The boy *is* afraid because the bullies *continue* beating him up.
12. Titles of short stories and poems should be in quotes: "The Street" and "The Road Not Taken." Titles of novels, movies, and plays should be in italics or underlined: *Of Mice and Men*, *Death of a Salesman*, *The Shawshank Redemption*.
13. READ YOUR PIECE OUT LOUD!!

Writing Authentic Dialogue

Overview

As we discussed in class yesterday, dialogue is one of the ways an author SHOWS rather than tells us information, emotion, and plot. You'll have a chance to practice writing one page of real, authentic, WOW, thick-as-honey-and-free-as-a-butterfly dialogue tonight for homework. It doesn't have to be perfect, but you're working hard to SHOW ideas, emotions, and plot rather than use a narrative voice to TELL the reader.

Below, check out my own example of one page of dialogue. It's not perfect, but you can see the writer in me working hard to SHOW instead of . . . yup . . . NO TELLING!

"So, how's the new apartment working out?" My father had phoned for the third time in three days. He had retired after a long career in the insurance business and had fondly said only weeks before, "Now I'm gonna have nothing to do except come over and see you and Jen!"

"It's really good so far, and it's slowly getting more and more organized." I sniffed a couple of times and blew my nose.

"Your allergies are still bothering you, huh? Have you gotten a vacuum yet?"

"No, Dad, not yet, but we're going to go to Bed, Bath and Beyond and pick something up later in the week." I sneezed, and I could almost see my father shudder.

"Alright, Lukis, Lukis-a-reno, you've got to get a vacuum with Hepa capabilities. Hepa is where it's at, Lukis. Hep-a! Hep-a! You've got to get one of those babies."

"Alright Dad-o, we'll pick up a Hepa vacuum cleaner—"

"Hep-a! Hep-a! It's all about the Hepa, big guy."

I knew my father was almost lost, so with all the resolve I could muster, I tried to change the subject.

"Hey Dad-o are you and Mom going on date night to the Bushnell this weekend?"

"Hep-a babes! Whoo, you've got to get a Hep-a. That thing will wipe the dust mites right out of those carpets. After you use a Hep-a vacuum it'll feel like dyin' and goin' to Heaven."

I was quiet for a moment. If he were here, Harry Wilson Reynolds III would have grabbed me by the shoulders and squeezed. He would have tried to do a Hepa vacuum dance. I shuddered.

"Dad, I think Jen needs me for a minute." Jen was out at the grocery store.

"Alright, but are you gonna buy a Hep-a vacuum cleaner? You need to get one of those!!"

"Dad-o, I love you, Big D."

"Love you too, babes. Hepa!"

We hung up. The next day, while I was at school setting up my classroom, my father came over with a red Kenmore vacuum and vacuumed the entire apartment for 2 hours. Jen couldn't stop him. Arriving home that day, I had no allergy problems, and when we went to bed, Jen asked, "Did you know that the vacuum your father bought us is a Hepa model?"

Your Task

Write **one page**, double-spaced, of dialogue that you had this summer. The above is a model.

- Indent each time a new character speaks.
- The conversation can be with two or more people. No conversations talking to yourself (yet, anyway).
- Include details about the people involved: their emotions, attitudes, physical descriptions if in person.
- Be creative, B-E Creative, B-E-C-R-E-A-T-I-V-E! Whoo! Whoo-ah! (Re-read this last requirement while doing a cheer of your own choreographic invention.)

Brief, Personal Writing Prompts

Note to Readers: These writing prompts have been very successful with high school and college students. They include connections to the lives of students, yet in ways that challenge them to think more broadly about reactions, responses, and their own hypothetical ability to handle situations. They can be used in class, used for homework, or expanded into longer creative works.

Someone very close to you dies. Who is it? How do you respond, and how does this affect your dreams, visions of the American Dream, and life as a whole?

You are driving home late one night and a drunk driver swerves and hits you. Your car is totaled, and you are in the hospital with serious injuries. Who is with you, and how do you handle the situation? The driver of the other car is also alive, and doctors say he would like to speak with you. What happens?

You become engaged. Who is the lucky man or woman, and how did the proposal go? How does this change your life?

You find out that you are pregnant or have impregnated someone else. Who is the father/mother? What do you plan to do about this situation?

You receive a promotion at work. What is the promotion, and what are your plans for your career path considering this promotion?

You lose three things very close and important to you. What are the three things, and what do you plan to do now that they are lost?

You may choose to have any three things you want. These can be very tangible or very intangible. What are they, and how did you get them?

On a long-distance (collect) phone call made to you last night, someone shared some earth-shattering news with you. What is the news, who was the person, and how does this change your life from here on out?

Last night, while you were watching *American Idol*, there were several urgent news interruptions. Something huge has happened that affects the world. What is it, and what do you do about it?

Your father dies. Write about who he was as a person, your relationship with him, and what you think about your own life now that this has happened.

You took a HUGE risk yesterday. It was one of the biggest and hardest things you've ever done. What was it, why did you take it, and what do you do now?

A close relative leaves her child on your doorstep, literally. She leaves you a note in rhyming couplets:

Here is little Johnny,
I can't be his Mommy.
He's too tough for me,
Please help me, see,
I can't take the care
That he needs to bear.

What do you do with the child? How does this change your view of life?

There is a huge crime committed in your hometown. It affects most of the members of the community, and many people are involved. What is it, and how does it affect your view of life?

You win the lottery. How much do you win? What do you do with the money? How does it affect your view of life?

You do something unbelievably great. This thing you do is so miraculous, so wonderful, so amazing that newspapers are beginning to write stories about it, and television programs are beginning to call. What is this thing you've done, and how will it change you?

You are wrongly accused of committing a crime. What crime have the police arrested you for, and why do you think they accused you instead of the person who really did it? How do you plan to get out of this mess? How does this affect your vision of America?

You have invented something. In your spare time, it just came to you. You patented it, and now it's on the market. What is it? Why did you do it? How much money are you making?

You did something very, very, very stupid. You are now apologizing to everyone you love. What was it, and why did you do it? Will people forgive you?

Listening to Random Thoughts

Overview

As we discussed in class and read from Anne Lamott, sometimes we need to open the floodgates of our minds in order to produce pearls of great beauty in our writing. As you prepare for YOUR OWN chance to record every thought and idea your brain processes, take a look through mine. Many are incredibly goofy. Some are serious. Some are in poetic form, others in prose, and there are even quotes that crossed my mind. Remember, anything goes here. Who knows—an idea or a line or a thought might be born that will become the seed for a great story, essay, or poem!

Mr. R.'s Random Thoughts (1 Hour)

Eating cereal at night is romantic to me. Those slowly softening cinnamon-touched flakes embody all that a good romance should be. And when, in front of the window sill, I stare out into the night sky, I wonder if—just maybe—you're not also chomping on a bowl of LIFE cereal.

"Melodies heard are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter." A great poet quipped these lines. I cannot remember the name of this great poet. Is it because the name is not what matters?

Jell-O, baby. It's all about the Jell-O. Green, red, and yellow. What a beautiful world.

And standing there in the hot twilight, I knew things would never be the same. *Damn*, I thought.

Don't feed me that line of crap. I want to know what really makes you tick.

If you really want to know, then, it's something I can't explain, but it is embodied every time I see a pair of birds swoop through the sky together. It's funny, but even when they're alone, birds never seem lonely. Why is that?

Tree leaves, bee stings, and why doesn't my landlady always put her car in the garage?

"My definition of poetry, if I were forced to give one, would be this: words that become deeds." —Robert Frost

Besides the air being
Cooler, driving at night makes
Me feel rebellious.

Slicing along the highway,
 You got to hate it, when the napkin breaks
 And the mucus slides all over your hand.

Baby hands grab hard.
 Big people grab harder,
 Cry longer,
 And when our hands are pried open,
 We pretend they were never clenched.

Fists are useful things
 Inside a huge can of grape jelly,
 Because then the stickiness would stay
 Out of the insides of your hands.

“In moments of ecstasy and joy, we all wish we had a tail we could wag.”
 —W. H. Auden

Really, what is the point of bumper stickers?
 Bumping into one another, what is the point of being real?
 Sticking is usually not a good thing,
 But sometimes, it's all we've got.
 So let's keep reading each other's bumpers.

If there were a world where oranges were the only food, then I would enjoy dancing
 with the people of that world. Also, I would, out of common courtesy, not ask them
 about apples.

When we've got to sneeze, it'd be nice to really let it all out.

As for coughing, I say, go for it.

Lying on the ground, looking up at the stars,
 Maybe the neighborhood kid comes by.
 We say hello to him, to his dog.
 Then we feel a bit better about ourselves.

We wonder about what is right and what is wrong,
 Taking tiny steps along
 Sidewalks with caution signs all over them.
 What if we ran in the fields instead?

Bursting forth, we are babies every moment of our lives if we are alive at all.

The only thing I can say about all that is, can you repeat it—this time slowly, and while
 spinning around in circles?

If I were to open up my own deli, I would call it “Ham It Up.”

Confidence is like an old bird watching the chicks fly. They’re swooping all over the place, hollering, revealing themselves. When they’re tired, he then silently slices the air, and with one long motion like the steady stroke of a pen across a blank page, makes them all gape.

Flavors are often fruits. Grape, Orange, Banana, Strawberry. Has anyone ever thought of making new flavors that do not exist? Some could be: Wanoma, Hogelu, and Gumoyo. Not only would this give people more options to choose from, but it would also free up the fruits to do more productive work, perhaps.

The purpose of writing—ah, I am not sure about that. Do we write because we have to, want to, or for the growth of our world and its people? If we write for any of these reasons, maybe we end up writing for them all.

The thing I wonder about Adam and Eve is: Did they fight? Did they disagree a lot?

What can we say about people who do not wear deodorant? Well, we can surely say that it is their prerogative. However, it still affects us. Is that like seat belts? No. But it must be like something, because everything is like something.

Gum is an interesting thing. We have taken all the knowledge of our species and invented something that causes our mouths to consistently open and close at a semiconstant rate for long periods of time without rest. And we pay for the ability to do this.

Appearances take up a lot of time, thought, and comparison. This is energy that could be well spent in a variety of different ways. For example, if I spend 20 minutes thinking about how I compare to the guy in the movie, I could have been writing my own screenplay for a new movie. And that is an idea I am not too proud of, nor am I sure why it even made it onto my random thoughts list. In fact, it could be the worst random thought I have ever had. It is nowhere near as interesting, or thoughtful, or even as honest as most of the other thoughts I have had. And now look at what I have done: wasted plenty of time comparing that last random thought to the other random thoughts when I could have been writing lots of new ones.

The safest place I can think of is lying between my parents when I was 2 or 3 years old and had woken up from a nightmare or there was a thunderstorm or something. I remember climbing in between those two big bodies, sleeping so easily, and as soon as I got in, it felt like my own little cave. A trench in the warfare of a 2-year-old’s life. And I manned my trench well. It’s cool to think that soon I may be a part of my own son’s safe place.

Windows: glasses for people with really big eyes.

What if every time a teacher gave a quiz, it was an official rule that the teacher also had to

say a tongue-twister? For example, "Alright, class, I hope that you've studied diligently and prepared well for your quiz on 18th-century French lifestyles. Close your books and I will pass out the quiz. And also, Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers. Good luck." I think that some students would do better on their quizzes. But it would also confuse a lot of students.

Maybe the way to be a good teacher is to be crazier than any of your students. For example, every time a student did something crazy, the teacher would do a crazier thing right back. Here's how a scenario might play out: Student A throws a pencil at Student B. Teacher sees incident. Teacher throws a cream pie at Student A. Oh, I forgot to mention that for this idea to work, the school board would have to agree to fund the purchase of lots of cream pies, and maybe other things like Burger King hats (although there is a chance that those could be donated), tricycles, and lots of clap-on lighting.

I think, perhaps, that a beautiful thing can be beautiful in lots of different ways. One way is its form, its shape. But another way is its presence. Not the thing itself, but a *sense* of the thing. A. E. Housmann once said, "Poetry is not the thing said, but a way of saying it." I remember the day I found that quote. I was buried in the stacks of a little, out-of-the-way library in Oxford.

Socrates said, "Wonder is the beginning of wisdom." I like that.

Okay, this is Mr. R. writing to you, my 11th-graders, again. My rational mind is writing to all of your rational minds. But now, get ready to be very *nonrational*. Spend 1 hour letting your mind record anything and everything it wants to. Your rational mind is moving out of the driver's seat, and in comes your Highly Creative Really Cool Though Never Having Much Time To Process Mind.

GO!

Introduction to Anthology Project

(Example from Actual Book, 7th-Grade Students)

Robert Frost once said, “No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader.” It was his way of suggesting that if a writer is not passionately interested in the words she is putting onto the page, then the reader will be indifferent as well.

In my 7 years of teaching, I have seen my fair share of disinterested students, launching questions toward the front of the classroom such as, “Mr. Reynolds, why do we have to write about *this*?” in that complaintive, sing-song way that only students possess. My answer has generally been, “Because it will help you in your next step in life (fill in the blank with *college, high school, the latest standardized test, etc.*)” However, perhaps more than preparation for their next steps in life—or at least just as much as—students also need opportunities to express who they are *now* and what they think, feel, and believe *now*. Indeed, as Frost might say, students need chances to write things of their own choosing, and about which they care: whether in ways serious or silly.

Essentially, this volume of essays, stories, and poems is just such a book. It has been crafted and created entirely by my students, and they have chosen their own topics and formats through which to pursue their interests in life and writing.

Additionally, we wanted the funds from this volume to benefit a cause outside ourselves. More than anything in these early years of the 21st century, students—as well as those who have long since said farewell to the classroom—need to comprehend the great responsibility that is ours on the world stage: that our individual and collective passions, strengths, and dreams should always possess the ability to aid another. Mark Twain’s words are best invoked toward this end: “To get the full value of joy, you have to have someone to share it with.”

Therefore, all of the proceeds raised by the sale of this little volume will benefit a charity which the students overwhelmingly chose to support through this year’s writing: Free the Slaves.

Currently, there are an estimated 27 million slaves worldwide. This staggering number includes those victims of sex trafficking, child slavery, and family bondage, where many people are kept against their will to make their owners rich. Kevin Bales, the world’s foremost expert on this tragic blight of slavery, founded Free the Slaves to work to stop slavery worldwide. His work focuses on freeing existing slaves, and also on helping others become aware of the tragedy of its current existence. If you are interested in learning more, please visit: www.freetheslaves.net.

Ultimately, this book is designed to accomplish two purposes: to allow students the room to write the things that are meaningful to them; and also to show them that their words have power to make a difference in the world around them—however small or large that difference may be. No act of courage, love, or caring is ever too small to count, and our hope is that this book may become a little act of love that creates some meaningful change.

—Luke Reynolds

Community-Forming Activities

(For English Classes, Wilderness Trips, Group Bonding, Role Development, Essentially: *Everything!*)

I. Trust Falls

The group breaks off into pairs (facilitator can choose pairs in order to ensure new partners). Each pair will practice trust. First, one person places hands across chest in an “X” fashion, then makes body straight and locks knees and back. Second person stands behind in “spotting” position: knees bent, arms extended, ready to break the fall of first person. First person says, “Ready, spotter?” Spotter replies, “Ready, _____ (name).” Falling person says, “Falling, spotter.” Spotter says, “Fall away.” This activity should be done three times with each person; as a pair becomes more comfortable, they can try closed eyes, farther falls, etc. But safety should come first! Facilitators should be aware of who is falling and when.

II. Elves, Wizards, Giants

This is a fun game to get groups active and involved. The group is split into two teams. Both groups are shown the signs for Elves (squat down and cup ears), Wizards (stand straight with arms out in front as if to cast spell), and Giants (stand tall with arms up high). A line is made down the middle of the field/court. Each group has a few minutes to gather at opposite ends of the field (their halves) and come up with a first-choice sign and second-choice sign. The facilitator calls both teams back to the center line. The teams line up, and the facilitator counts, “1, 2, 3 . . . GO!” As GO is yelled, both teams perform signs. Elves beat Giants, Wizards beat elves, and Giants beat Wizards. Whichever teams wins must chase the other team and try to touch them. All members that are touched now switch alliances. If members make it back to their home (the part of the field where they discuss signs), then they are safe. The process is repeated. If the same signs are shown, then teams revert to second-choice signs.

III. Get over the Barrier

A line of yarn or rope, or a meter stick, is placed a little above waist height (3–4 feet, higher or lower depending on level of challenge). Working as a whole, the group must try to get itself over the barrier without touching it. The group must be holding hands in a chain throughout the entire process, except for one break (one place where two hands do not have to be held). Once on the other side of the barrier, a member can let go of the hands. But he or she can only spot (standing close by with hands outstretched, to prevent any potentially injurious tumbles), not help lift others.

IV. Trust Walk

Students are blindfolded with handkerchiefs. The facilitator places students' hands inside those of other students. No talking can be made a rule to heighten the experience/challenge. The facilitator takes his or her place at the front of the line and leads students under trees, over obstacles, etc. (This can be made more or less challenging as the level of the group is assessed.) Afterward, a good discussion should ensue.

V. Make a Box

The group is blindfolded and placed inside a rope that is in the form of a circle. Group members must always have at least one hand touching the rope and must stay inside it. The objective is to make a box. For the first few minutes, they can talk; depending on how the group is doing (and whether the instructor wants the activity to be more or less challenging), the permission to talk may then be revoked. After an allotted time, the group then removes blindfolds to see how close they have come to making a box.

Debriefing/Discussing

Just as important as the experience of these activities is the debriefing that happens afterward. A mentor used to tell me, "You had the experience but missed the meaning." Debriefing helps to ensure that students will take home the meaning of what they've done, not just the fun or difficulty of the experience. Here are some good debriefing questions:

1. When did you feel most challenged? Why?
2. At what point in the activity did you have the most fun?
3. Name something that you saw someone else doing that you admired or thought was kind.
4. Did you see anyone challenge themselves or do something they thought they could not do?
5. If you could do it over again, what would you do differently knowing what you know now?
6. How do you think you did as a team?
7. Do the goals of the team and the goals of each person always line up? Why or why not?
8. What can we do as a team to communicate better and work more effectively together?
9. What are your personal strengths?
10. What are your personal weaknesses?
11. What are your strengths and weaknesses as a team?

At least some of these debriefing questions should be explored after each activity for about 15 minutes. Have fun, push forward, and remember what Eleanor Roosevelt said: "You must do the things you think you cannot do."