CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

IDEAS

This chapter comprises any kind of discourse intended chiefly to assert general statements—aphorisms, essays, editorials, manifestoes, discussions of ideas, theses, and some lyric and philosophical poetry. It is not easy to separate fact from thought, especially since, when explicit, both are asserted through the present tense of generalization, but still this difference in emphasis is what distinguishes *INFORMATION* from *IDEAS*. Here we're concerned with opinion, reflection, generalization, and argumentation. These are often supported by material from *INFORMATION* and *TRUE STORIES* as evidence or illustration of points, but no matter how great the quantity of such documenting material, the discourse here is predominantly organized around general ideas.

But of course *all* writing is about ideas. The other kinds of discourse embody ideas or embed ideas. The characters and actions in fiction, drama, and poetry, for example, exemplify people and events so representatively that the plot and its "conclusion" *imply* some general truths. Story *embodies* statement. In addition, the narrator and the characters frequently make explicit generalizations about the subject of the story and perhaps about life at large that the author *embeds* in the story to prompt the reader to reflect on it. (If he does so too obviously, however, such characters may be regarded as "mouthpieces" or *raisoneurs*.) The idea element of invented stories is traditionally called the "theme," and much of literary interpretation, for better or for worse, attempts to distill this meaning. Inasmuch as true stories serve as cases or examples of one sort or another, they too embody generalities, and they too contain embedded generalizations, often at the beginning or end to frame the story with significance.

So ideas may either be expressed *implicitly* or stated *explicitly*. The explicit seems to emerge from the implicit in a developmental way in the growth of the child and in the process of composition. Before plunging into discourse organized for the bald assertion of generalities, let's look a moment at the implicit or symbolic mode of treating ideas, because it shades into the subject of this chapter, as we've been trying to suggest broadly by the progression of kinds of discourse in this Part Three. Since the blending of implicit and explicit occurs in various ratios throughout all discourse, we'll merely sample a kind that may best show how ideas may be implied, and how poetry and essay complement each other.

LOADED DESCRIPTION

Sometimes a description is not intended as an objective rendering of things; it's so infused with attitude or response that the things described become, rather, a medium of expression, a language themselves. There's no neat dividing line between the two, however, as we showed in the samples of sensory recording in *Writing*. Subjectivity always infuses description, as it does everything we do, but here we're considering the type of description that is deliberately loaded—either for a rhetorical end as in an advertisement, or for the expression of personal response as in a considerable amount of poetry. This intentional pseudo-description implies ideas. The things described, in other words, become figures of speech.

■ ADVERTISEMENTS

Advertisements are pseudo-descriptions inasmuch as products and services are transformed by language and imagery into metaphors for desires and fears. This is not an odious comparison between advertising and poetry, because only the method is similar, not the motive—or the result.

Exploring the techniques of ads (and other propaganda) has the effect of preventing youngsters from being taken in by them. Surely one obligation of a language arts program is to dispel naive credulity. Ads make good discussion topics, and reading ads for this purpose is a valid school activity. Some are clever, witty, and rhetorically quite skillful, but discussion should constantly call the key question, "Is this also honest?" Does an ad document or prove its claims? By what evidence or reasoning? How much of an ad is mere allure? Which fears and desires does it play on?

Again, writing in a form one reads makes a more perceptive reader. To role-play an advertiser is to engage in a specialized type of show-and-tell, since the aim is not only to inform or entertain your listeners but to stir them to want what you have to sell. Improvising and writing up sales pitches are activities that are easy for most youngsters because of the immersion in this medium that our culture affords. Students can advertise services they're willing to perform for each other in exchange for other services, items to sell or trade, or services wanted (as in newspaper want ads or personals columns). They can proclaim invented products that meet a need as yet unmet by things now on the market, or they can try to get rid of items no longer needed.

Ads can be oral, like radio and TV commercials, or written, as on posters or in magazines. What do students find themselves saying in order to make clear in a succinct presentation what they're selling and to attract and convince customers? Part of this process might be to take an object and describe it objectively, then describe it again as if they were trying to sell it—a clear way to experience what happens to facts when they're used for a specific rhetorical end.

Some ad-writing might be for fun or discussion, but ads should also be treated as realistically as other discourse—placed or published wherever they might reach potential consumers. Some classes may want to hold contests for the most unusual or effective advertisements. Setting up criteria and judging entries should embroil students in all the right issues of methods and morals, effectiveness and honesty. Do some ads do justice to both? If so, how do they succeed?

■ MAKING IT STRANGE

If loaded description comes from looking at the world from a partial point of view, then *all* description by mortals is loaded. True, but most of us most of the time don't *intend* to invest things with our mind-set. (We just can't help it!) Poetry and advertising deliberately exploit all the wiles and guiles of rhetoric to achieve an effect on us. Their purpose is to make sure we don't see something just as we ordinarily do but that we see it *their* way, through a new lens.

Poets try to make us see familiar things in an unfamiliar way, to freshen and deepen our vision. So they load their description in a way that will teach us to see anew, to look again. But why not do this for oneself? This is the idea of making something strange. One way is to describe the familiar behavior, artifacts, and customs around us as they might strike a foreigner. Eighteenth-century writers like Voltaire (*Micromégas*), Montesqieu, (*Persian Letters*), and Swift (*Gulliver's Travels*) imagined what a visitor from another culture would make of the one he visited—a good way to critique and satirize one's own. In our day Gore Vidal did this in *Visit to a Small Planet* (earth). An anthropologist's accounts of other cultures often differ amusingly from the subjects' own view. How would an archaeologist from a future culture describe what he dug up from America of today? A number of students might enjoy writing a description of their neighborhood, home, workplace, or other familiar settings as they might appear to an alien.

Any comparisons may, by comparing something from one realm to something in another (a mushroom to a frozen geyser), make it strange.[1] One way to evoke original metaphor is to contemplate an abstract design or simple shape and brainstorm a list of all the things it looks like.[2] Thus a pattern like this

might remind students of: a row of chimney pots, the top of a medieval tower, or jack-o-lantern teeth. A follow-up is to make up one line of a poem describing one of the items on their list of things the design suggests, then write a line about a second item, and finally a third line that could refer to either. Here's a class collaboration written by a group of second and third graders:

At midnight, shining sky scrapers—
teeth of the zipper that holds
the night sky down like black velvet.

■ HAIKU

Haiku are noted for making a subtle statement through a closely observed sensuous moment. As students work with haiku, they learn to express feeling in the concrete terms of what evokes it and so gain entrance into the whole world of

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[1] The notion of "making it strange" came from a book of that title (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), now out of print, that presented a series of creative activities for putting ideas about familiar things into metaphor.
[2] Our thanks to Michael Anania, University of Illinois at Chicago, who invented this prompt while poet in residence at Lincolnwood School, Evanston, Illinois.

poetry. As loaded description, a haiku is at once about observer and observed. Its fidelity to things gives it a certain objectivity, but things are always registered by some sensibility. The object one senses is usually something in the natural world that the poet presents in an unexpected way.

Because haiku offers a number of special advantages for learning how figurative language can be used, we'll dwell on this form at some length here. This doesn't mean that other poetic forms should receive less treatment in the classroom but simply that haiku characterizes poetry generally and yet is short enough for concentrated focus on a whole discourse. In a haiku every word counts.

Since the original haiku form is defined to a great extent by qualities peculiar to the Japanese language and not present in English, it's useless to try to define it too precisely by form. The Japanese original has no rhyme and no punctuation, uses a stock of "cut-words," or particle words, that serve for expressive punctuation, and contains a much smaller number of syllables than an English poem possibly could. All we can say about the haiku form in English is that it usually consists of one sentence, often broken in the middle by a dash or colon, set typographically into two or three lines. We prefer the three-line form because it gives more opportunity for making use of line-breaking, which is a unique feature of poetry. Because the form can't be defined technically in terms of English prosody, the matter of line length, rhyme, and metrical dimension must be left open. The best definition is probably not by form but by substance—the luminous moment. In any case, it's better, as usual, to let students infer what haiku are from reading instances of them and from trying to write their own.

Writer's notebooks, sensory and memory notes, diaries, and other previous compositions might all contain particulars from which to make a haiku. One second will do, some moment when a sound, sight, smell, taste, or touch triggers a strong response or sets a mood, releasing a feeling. After writing partners have drafted some haiku, they pass them around and each member of the group writes on and around the haiku of the others, with the understanding that this is for suggestive value to the writer, who may perfectly well prefer his version to the revisions. In comparing and discussing different versions, the students can see how almost every change of vocabulary, sentence structure, and punctuation alters image and impact, sound and sense. Booklets of student haiku, we have found, are eagerly read and often discussed.

THE PROBLEM OF OVERABSTRACTING

Like poetry generally, haiku let metaphor imply ideas in the form of perception and feeling. The difficulties students encounter trying to write haiku are the difficulties they encounter trying to write most kinds of poetry. The biggest, most consistent problem—which we observed many times as various teachers, including ourselves, have proposed haiku writing—is that students overabstract. They see macroscopically, grossly; instead of caterpillar hairs they observe:

A warm silent lake.
On a calm summer day...
Wake up, back to work.

This ninth-grade boy's haiku is very typical of many efforts. First, he has generalized an entire day, instead of registering what could be perceived only within a very brief compass of time and space. (It is fine calibrations of time and space that

define concreteness.) Second, he has named, instead of rendered, the sensations—"warm," "silent," "calm." Likewise, he has stated, instead of implied, the season and the time—"summer day"—and all but flatly asserted his feeling—"Wake up," "back to work." This overabstraction of both outer things and inner experience is the mark of amateur poetry and of much nondescript, ineffectual prose as well.

Why should such writing be the spontaneous tendency of a person this age? We're not sure, but we think two very important learning factors are involved. One is developmental: youngsters grow gradually away from crude lumping toward finer and finer discriminations of perception and thought. The other is conventional: most expressions of perception and thought that youngsters hear and read are hasty, inexact verbalizations of the real things people want to express. Familiar general phrases like "summer day" come out of us automatically and indiscriminately in response to very different moments of experience.

Some masking of particularity is learned from reading bad, vague poetry, and some is learned from thoughtlessly diffuse categories that adults hand down:

SNOW STORMS

Window's shuttered white.
Children showing sheer delight.
Oh, what loveliness.

"Shuttered white" renders a nice metaphor and rhymes pleasantly with "sheer delight," but this seventh-grade girl doesn't depict how the children showed delight, nor does she evoke the feeling she had. She simply labels both feelings. The fact that the title is plural betrays the abstract attitude. We're not criticizing the children (or the teaching), for the problem epitomizes everyone's lifelong struggle to experience afresh and not let the ever busy abstracting apparatus reduce it to generic platitude.

For contrast, here's what we think is a very good haiku, which notes inner and outer reality at once. A tenth-grade boy wrote this:

Breath on the window-pane—
remnants of someone watching
others play.

The breath did not linger as a remnant on that windowpane for more than a few seconds—and that's the chief reason for the poem's success. But a lot of sophistication lies behind such specificity and behind the indirect expression of feeling. Because the writer puts us in the moment, we feel the poignancy of it, as we couldn't if he merely named a feeling we were supposed to feel.

To help students as much as possible to zero in on a moment and to render it as they really perceive it, the most useful thing you can do is to say, "Catch a feeling that you could not have had several minutes afterward or several minutes before." The more students read of each other's poems, the more impatient they become with imitation; this peer pressure exerts a strong force in favor of originality. Students can help each other to sort the fake from the real.

But borrowing is also necessary; from a common stock of phrases the individual gradually forms new combinations of words. The need for slow metamorphosis was brought home to one of us by the following haiku, which was far more popular among the author's tenth-grade Exeter classmates than we thought it should be.

Green shoots take breath
and bathe in tears for
winter's death.

Whereas advanced students probably would have scorned its clichés, the tenth-grade boys liked it tremendously for its slick play of sounds, the regular meter of the last two lines, and the rephrased but essentially familiar imagery. Without judging their judgment, we thought about their reasons for enjoying it and realized that the poem had the same winning way that so many hackneyed but pretty Elizabethan lyrics have, the kind that are moving when set to music but are distinguishable one from another only by variant wording when examined as texts. Still, a student recombining old stuff in his somewhat new way is enjoying language, exploring it, and getting ready to make it do his will.

The breakaway from clichés occurs most often with fresh subject matter, for familiar subjects come replete by association with the language that others have cast them into. Hackneyed description is *culturally* not *personally* loaded. That is the kernel of the matter and a powerful reason for tying writing to fresh perception.

Here are two poems by tenth-grade boys, both of whom began with their own sensory experience, not generalization:

Towels hung up to dry
Across the road—
It's raining now.

Through the cracked planks
of an unfinished house,
one violet opens.

These poems illustrate how the subtlety of haiku teaches the reporter's art of making an indirect statement by sheer juxtaposition of two physical facts. It reminds us of how powerfully focus alone speaks. The simple singling out of a detail immediately invests that detail with meaning—loads description—even when the diction is neutral and no attitude is otherwise detectable. In this sense, poems may state ideas. Many photographs demonstrate this power of sheer selection.

Generalizing in poetry is not in itself bad. Explicit statement can sometimes spring feeling in a startling way. Shakespeare's phrase, "uncertain glory of an April day," for example, evokes fleeting cloud shadows and passing showers, because the reader fills in the abstraction with concrete details he remembers; as he does so, he feels the way he has felt on experiencing such weather. What makes this work is the unusual yoking of "uncertain" with "glory," plus a skillful prediction of the reader's associations. (But the original meaning of "glory" is more concrete—"aureole"—and so suggests here the sun appearing and disappearing.)

So students may sometimes come off well using this sort of generalized wording. The test is in reader response, which cross-commentary can furnish. Class discussion and small-group reading should help students sort out mere vagueness from happy phrasing that's abstract but evocative. On page 406 is a sample of a student's philosophical epigram in which concrete objects are used symbolically.

Haiku is a form that lends itself to imparting a state of mind without departing from the physical facts. A ninth-grade boy wrote:

From the darkened heavens,
Striking all around,
Rain.

By suspending the subject "rain" until the last line, he lets us be struck from the dark without knowing at first what is striking. The pattern of words conveys as much as their meanings. This high school boy was a very knowledgeable naturalist:

Emphatic song
ascending through the woods,
the oven bird.

With bulbous eyes,
soar above the pond
the dragonflies.

When young people write, they work intuitively with rhythm, especially if they've experienced a lot of poetry. Unable to render the birdsong itself, in the first haiku, this boy captured the ascension (of the bird and the song with it) by sustaining a regular iambic meter, thereby illustrating what a text on prosody might explain in vain, that lines beginning on an unstressed syllable and ending on a stressed produce a swelling, lifting effect if the lines are relatively unbroken. Like Keats's nightingale, this bird remains unseen and hence easily invokes the impression of disembodied spirit, especially since it is ascending. His second haiku combines a stunningly salient detail with precise diction ("bulbous," "soar"), natural rhyme, and a tight, suspended sentence structure.

How to break the lines and whether to rhyme are important decisions student writers of haiku will have to make, along with any consideration about meter and rhythm. Most haiku tend to break, or pause, at the end of the first or second line or in the middle, a thought form that students may be left to observe themselves. Using this kind of caesura in composing haiku will usefully influence their choices about sentence construction, punctuation, and development of image and idea.

Some students might enjoy following the "answering" haiku pattern, in which one poet writes a three-line haiku and another writes a variation of it or a response in two additional lines having a caesura between.

ILLUSTRATING HAIKU

Another way to gain a perspective on what haiku can do is to draw, paint, or photograph the image in a particularly visual haiku and compare illustrations of the same haiku. Discussing these haiku with illustrations brings out what can be rendered visually and what must remain in the words of the poem. Which aspects of the poem did no one succeeded in conveying visually? This tends to show how much is either word play or idea.

COMPARING TRANSLATIONS

Students can look at two translations of the same haiku side by side, read them aloud, and discuss which they prefer. This can be especially worthwhile because the translations of haiku differ so markedly in image, tone, and feeling as well as in the use of rhyme, pattern, and number of lines (two to four). Does some "idea"

nevertheless persevere across translations, expressed perhaps more explicitly in one version than the other? Or do variant translations of the same haiku seem to have different points?

■ OTHER POEMS OF OBSERVATION

The comparison approach can also help bridge from haiku to other poetry. Students can pair off a haiku with some other fairly short and concrete poem that seems to treat a similar subject. Of course *similar* involves interpretation, which makes good discussion. For example, Carl Sandburg's "Grass" and Emily Dickinson's "Snake" seem remarkably like two haiku in the Henderson collection (pages 166 and 181) cited in our footnote on page 163. Such pairs might be given thoughtful class readings before or after discussion. ("Grass" is a kind of soliloquy spoken by the grass itself.)

According to the poems the haiku are paired with, a number of interesting issues come up. Sheer length, for example, involves these differences:

- the moment versus time sequence
- subtle suggestion versus descriptive elaboration
- intrasentence versus intersentence relations
- the single and sudden impact versus progression and development
- the isolated verse unit versus multiple stanzas

What are the gains and losses of brevity? Of length? Several times students have pointed out that Dickinson's "Snake" contains several possible haiku embedded in it, and that the climax is really a haiku. What these juxtaposed pairs do is set off the particular qualities of each poem. They induce discriminations valuable for understanding and appreciating many kinds of poems.

Like haiku, many concrete English poems consist of only a few lines, some of them only a single sentence, like Robert Frost's "Dust of Snow," Francis Frost's "Skaters," Samuel Hazo's "The Parachutist," and Anna Engleman's "In a Vacant Lot." Students first venturing into poetry writing might try their hand at such poems of loaded description. An inspiration might come from a striking pattern other than that of haiku, like the one in William Carlos Williams's "The Red Wheelbarrow"—four stanzas of two lines each, the second line being always a single word. Or it might come from a beloved or pressing subject, such as sports, animals, or weather. When students read other classmates' writing, they should acquire the habit of writing "poem" in the margin when they see something they think the writer ought to make into a poem.

SINGLE STATEMENTS

Some generalizations stated in a sentence or less constitute complete discourses in the realm of ideas. Thus sayings and slogans offer a legitimate opportunity to analyze and otherwise work or play authentically within the structure of a single sentence. Such isolated statements can be looked at for refined work with construction without being divested of point and purpose as sentences pulled out of context might be. Young children appreciate single statements many years before they're able to create or make sense of a developed and supported essay.

Encourage students to read and test each other's generalizations and to rewrite them. Both the content and the form of a statement can be discussed and amended to qualify the idea by altering or adding words, phrases, and clauses; and to improve the rhetoric by adjusting diction and sentence structure for greater effect. The brevity encourages many students to spend much more time working on a single phrase or sentence than they would if it were part of a longer continuity. They can examine alternate ways of punctuating, ordering words, or constructing sentences to see which best suits their purpose.

Short statements have another great advantage in that they are small enough to post in the classroom, to show together, perhaps as the work of several students, or to serve as the basis for a semipermanent board that can be continuously added to and changed, prompting people simply to walk up and add or change statements already posted there. These also invite illustration and thus become captions (see "Wit" on page 298).

A good way to stimulate short discourse is to set up a graffiti board. Ideally, this board should be erased, painted over, or covered with clean newsprint or wrapping paper every night or very frequently so more students can have a chance to contribute to it, and so there's incentive to check it out often, or to copy the best for a classroom graffiti collection. One teacher solved the problem of space for a board by propping a large pad of newsprint on a paint easel and flipping over a new page each day.

A badge-making kit is a popular stimulus for sharing values or insights in the form of short maxims. These may be nonverbal messages, of course, like the smile buttons. If you don't have a badge-making kit, use pop-bottle caps, removing the inside carefully, painting the cap, printing the message on it, and pushing the material of a shirt or blouse into the back of the cap and sealing it with the inside of the cap. Maxims can also be printed onto T-shirts or made into bumper stickers. Posters or protest placards are another medium for presenting short idea statements. Students often enjoy adding a design or picture to emphasize the message.

Popular culture abounds in advice and maxims—short and snappy statements of ideas. Most are propaganda or advertisement of ideas, many are humor, and some are pure word play. All provide an entrée into short idea statement. They perpetuate in modern media the ancient tradition of epigram or moralistic aphorism.

■ EPITAPHS

Another type of environmental writing is inscriptions on tombstones or monuments in memory of the dead, or any short elegies in prose or verse. They're a more ancient and respectable cultural form of what lives on as graffiti. Students can go to graveyards and look for epitaphs on the tombstones, making rubbings to show the class. The older the cemetery, the more likely students are to find epitaphs. Children might want to write epitaphs for pets who've died. They can also make up apt ones for famous persons whose biographies they've read. Some may find it intriguing to write an epitaph for their own gravestone.

Collections of epitaphs, such as *Over Their Dead Bodies* by Thomas C. Mann and Janet Greene (The Stephen Greene Press/Pelham Books, Lexington, MA), can be part of the classroom library. For example, on the day after the poet John Donne's burial in 1631 some unknown friend wrote this epitaph with a piece of coal on the wall over his grave:

Reader! I am to let thee know,
Donne's body only lies below;
For, could the grave his soul comprise,
Earth would be richer than the skies.

■ PROVERBS

Proverbs are pithy folk sayings in metaphor and are often partly versified, like "Birds of a feather flock together." Part of a long tradition, they express generally accepted views of common human experience; it's understood that anyone can easily supply his own instances of these general truths from his own experience.

Because proverbs are in the air, part of the oral literature passed down by word of mouth, they'll be recognized by many children when they see them in print; they'll know some as they do jokes and riddles that they can write down and collect.

Because they're virtually always based on a figure of speech, they provide an excellent way for students to work with metaphor as a complete discourse in itself. Far too many school efforts to have children focus on metaphor in longer kinds of discourse desecrate it in the very act of isolating it from context.

As noted on page 88, proverbs make good topics for small-group discussion, pushing students to translate the metaphor into other applications. What do they think are examples of a rolling stone not gathering moss? Encourage students to read proverbs aloud and talk about each one long enough to explore its meaning, implications, and potential truth. This amounts to testing each, trying it out on each other, and attempting to find instances that would support or refute it.

A good way to lead into this discussion or perhaps follow it up is to illustrate some proverbs graphically as well, because unless one simply draws the figures of speech themselves—a rolling stone or birds flocking together—one has to depict some example of it such as discussion would bring out. If members of a group show each other their illustrations of the same proverb, any tendency to illustrate the metaphor literally will probably be noted and discussed by partners or at least challenged at some point. Illustrating a proverb by depicting some application of the metaphor is an excellent way to deal with literal-mindedness and to bring out the way in which any figure of speech works—by standing for something similar in another domain.

Another thing students can do is to write individually why they think a proverb the group has chosen is true or not and then come together afterward to read and compare ideas about it. Testing proverbs this way entails not just supplying instances but using them to prove or disprove a statement, that is, arguing a mini-thesis.

Collections of proverbs provide excellent reading matter focusing on metaphor. See the *Book of English Proverbs* by V. H. Collins, *The Wit and Wisdom from West Africa* by Sir Richard Francis Burton, *Proverbs and Common Sayings from the Chinese* by A. H. Smith, *Dictionary of American Proverbs* by David Platkin, or *Proverbs of Many Nations*, edited by Emery Klein.

After they've read some proverbs, students can try their hand at writing their own. Original metaphors that distill general truths aren't easy, but they're well worth trying. One way to begin is to state a truth nonmetaphorically and then see if you can compare it to another kind of experience. What comes to mind? A game like the metaphor game described on page 396 helps limber students up for proverb-making.

■ APHORISMS AND MAXIMS

These single-sentence sayings are concise statements of a principle—typically, rules of conduct stated sententiously. Unlike proverbs, they're not metaphorical. They may be in verse, as in Benjamin Franklin's "Early to bed and early to rise/Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise." Their truths are of general import, as in the African-American maxim, "You can't hurry up good times by waiting for them."

A good way to begin writing aphorisms is to write morals for fables (with their own morals covered up), folk tales, myths, or legends (see page 339). The moral of a tale, taken by itself, is much like a proverb or maxim in that it usually represents an extreme condensation of common experience. Hence it can be used as a way into discussing, reading, and writing ideas.

There's a natural relationship between anecdote or incident on the one hand and generalization or idea on the other; students can see it in their own knowledge-building—namely, that out of a build-up of instances one distills generalizations or ideas or principles of behavior, and that, conversely, one's reflections are just that, a reflex or reaction to factual things, often to events, objects, places, or people, that directly stimulate certain ideas or generalizations. The close relation between instance and idea is the essence of knowledge-building and provides organic motives and means for reading and writing.

Students can pluck from magazines and newspapers or other reading matter certain statements that they think could stand alone as a saying and then illustrate each statement with a drawing or photograph or with an anecdote that fits it. Others might like to make a little booklet in which each page bears a saying and some illustration that may or may not go with it. A very popular activity may be for a small group to ransack different books of proverbs and aphorisms, especially from many different cultures, and put together their own anthology.

Aphorisms and maxims are very useful as ready-made topics both for group discussion and for idea writing. It's important that students choose or make up their own sayings to talk or write about, since success in treating a generalization depends a great deal upon interest in the idea.

Sometimes students can create their single statements

- to serve as topics for discussion.
- to crystallize points made in discussion.
- to restate a generalization that was implicit in or beginning to emerge from some previous writing.
- to prestate their main idea for some new writing.

Thus writing single-sentence generalizations ties into dialogues of ideas and the writing of essays.

Steep students in literary examples of generalization—those that are propositions and thus lend themselves well to discussion.[3] Conclusions based on experi-

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[3] Many discussable statements can be found in Blaise Pascal's *Pensées*, François de La Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*, and the poet-mathematician Paul Valéry's analects in his Collected Works. See also, of course, Benjamin Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*

ences, observations, or experiments invite challenge from those whose experience does not support such a position. Students might enjoy amending, documenting, or refuting literary generalizations. Here are some that invite response:

> It is because of men that women dislike each other. (Jean de La Bruyère)
>
> Nobody can misunderstand a boy like his own mother. (William 0. Douglas)
>
> Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. (Alexander Pope)
>
> Problems are difficult to solve when they require the use of the familiar in an unfamiliar way. (Bernard Berelson and Gary Steiner)
>
> One is ordinarily more convinced of something by reasons he has found himself than by those that other people have thought up. (Blaise Pascal)
>
> There are people who would never have been in love if they had never heard of love. (François de La Rochefoucauld)

Among the many other uses of one-line sayings is the supplying of fodder—ready-made statements—that students can use in certain activities of making syllogisms and spotting illogical connections among statements (see page 425).

Collections of literary generalizations for the classroom library might include: *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations* by John Bartlett, *Contemporary Quotations* by J. B. Simpson, and the *Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*.

■ DICTIONARY DEFINITIONS

Defining is the process of arraying synonyms or explaining what something means. Some definitions present information; others, ideas. Obviously, students need repeated opportunity both to use dictionaries and to make up their own operating definitions for words and concepts they use. When defining is not done by citing synonyms, it consists of single-statement generalizations in the present tense.

One of the best ways for students to become involved in dictionaries is to compile one of some special lingo. This can be their own local or age-group slang or the special vocabulary of some activity and its practitioners, like dirt-bike riders or computer hackers. The idea is to supplement standard dictionaries. In the process of checking their usage with dictionary listings, they'll become familiar with the format and can imitate it as they compose their own entries. They collect words on index cards bearing their definitions, collate variants for the same entry, and alphabetize final versions. Polling is a good idea even if the compiler belongs to the group, because often members have different version of a term's meaning once they start trying to define it (see "Dictionaries and Encyclopedias" on page 298).

The meanings of words reside in human communities, and dictionaries merely record these meanings. Dictionaries of nonstandard ethnic or regional dialects like Gulla in South Carolina make interesting reading and constitute an important kind of investigation. They also help validate and honor minority speech, something that might be appreciated by the native speakers, whom students can poll as part of collecting words and phrases for entry items.

Specialized dictionaries that some students would enjoy are Ambrose Bierce's satirical *The Devil's Dictionary* and one of Isaac Asimov's, such as *Words of Science and the History Behind Them.*

Students can follow Bierce's example or write other sorts of imaginative or humorous dictionaries. A very different model is the "Happiness is..." books. Con-

cepts such as "life" or "hate," various colors, or objects can be defined metaphorically, or operationally as in the picture book *A Hole is to Dig* by Ruth Krauss ("Sisters are to be jealous of."). "Daffynitions" are funny or witty ways of defining that can be thought up in groups and made into booklets. Sometimes the humor is in the wording ("picnic" as an "eating outing"), sometimes in a point of view ("risk" as defined by people in different walks of life or professions). Imaginative and witty definition leads naturally into epigrams, many of which are just that.

■ EPIGRAMS

These are witty, brief, pointed remarks or observations typically marked by antithesis, like this:

> War is for the sake of peace, but peace is not for the sake of war. (Menander)

Sometimes epigrams are memorable definitions, as:

> White is calling Africa the Dark Continent. (Preston Wilcox)
>
> Work is the curse of the drinking class. (Oscar Wilde)
>
> A cynic is a man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing. (Oscar Wilde)
>
> Radicalism is the conservatism of tomorrow injected into the affairs of today. (Ambrose Bierce)

Other epigrams are verses:

> A Robin Red Breast in a Cage
> Puts all Heaven in a Rage. (William Blake)
>
> OF EPIGRAMS
>
> Short epigrams relish both sweet and sour
> Like fritters of sour apples and sweet flour. (Robert Hayman)

In trying to write haiku, some students will come up with philosophical epigrams. Often these will be hand-me-downs, but many times they'll be fairly original expressions of an idea as in this remarkable compact expression of a generality through imagery:

> The stone axe falls,
> Discarded beside a rusted musket
> And Bikini vanishes beneath the waves.[4]

This tenth grader has written a three-line history of war delineated by the weapons used.

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[4] From Phillips Exeter Academy, Exeter, New Hampshire.

DIALOGUE OF IDEAS

Improvisations such as Playing the Problem described on page 108 help students explore ways to deal with difficulties in their own lives. Because they're in role, they're able to examine the problem and explore solutions more imaginatively. After an improvisation they can write their own generalized statement of how to deal with such a problem; this might become a topic for a discussion, an advice-column letter, or an essay.

■ TOPIC TALK

Discussion consists of constant adjustment: words are substituted, sentences qualified, ideas amended. You can facilitate this process of adjustment. Suppose the topic is "Getting Along in Families." Opinions are piling up on all sides, but no idea is fastened and examined for a moment. Students are agreeing or disagreeing too quickly, without knowing what the statements of others mean or imply. They are lining up sides, identifying with or opposing other students. Word meanings are loose and statements unqualified. You suggest that they linger over one statement: "Ellen just said, 'Younger children of a family get their way more often than the older children.' From what Bill just said it's clear that he disagrees. But look at her statement a moment. Is it *never* true? Is it *always*? Instead of just accepting or rejecting it, see to what extent you can accept it and to what extent you cannot."

In other words, suggest *a strategy of amending a statement until it becomes acceptable*—that is, of *quantifying* and *qualifying* it. In regard to how many people is the statement true—all, most, some, a few? For what kind of people, background, circumstances? The qualifying leads to linguistic amendments. One adds: limiting adjectives and adverbs; phrases of time, place, manner, and condition; clauses of condition, concession, exception (introduced by *if*, *although*, *unless*, and so on). Qualification of thought and elaboration of sentence structure tend to go together. Show that the group can correctly tailor a statement to fit what the majority thinks is true: "In America today a younger child is more likely to get his way with parents than an older child but is no freer because the older child restrains him in turn."

But disagreement may well continue. "Bill, what evidence would Ellen need to convince you?" The piling of opinions represents not only a failure to consider closely what others have said but also a tendency to stop short at assertions instead of supporting them. For a given assertion, ask them what *kind* of evidence *could* support it. Is it supportable at all? If so, with what? Firsthand examples? Citations from authorities? Statistics?

Help them to distinguish between disagreements that cannot be resolved by documentation and those that can. Often a discussion falters because none of the participants can support a stand. Tell them to bring evidence to the next session. If each can base his case only on personal experience, then what is that experience? Anecdotes may be appropriate for homespun subjects but very inadequate for supporting generalities of a more scientific sort. "How could we find out which of us is more nearly right?" That question should recur throughout discussions and will prompt some excellent investigative projects.

The best strategy for discussing a certain topic might well be exactly the strategy that students should adopt in *writing* about that topic. Through discussion, they can learn together how to handle many of the problems of abstract idea writing, from how to assert single statements to how to phase an attack on a subject.

Involved idea writing often results when a spirited but unresolved small-group discussion is taken to paper. The topic is whatever the unresolved issue is about. Such writing gives everyone a chance to rebut or get the last word. Papers can be fed back into discussion by projecting and distributing them. Interaction between discussion and writing is essential. Generalizations plucked from student papers can become topics for small groups. Many of the investigative activities of the previous chapter will produce good subjects for idea discussion. When students in a writing workshop discuss the compositional issues of each other's papers, moreover, they usually discuss the truth of the ideas as well. These discussions generate a classroom drama of ideas.

■ ADVICE LETTERS

An advice column modeled after "Dear Abby" in a class newspaper or on a bulletin board is another stimulus to a dialogue of ideas. Students with real or pretended problems can write for advice, using fictitious signatures if they like, to avoid exposure. Other students can answer the letter and post or distribute both the request and advice letter. A group may discuss and role-play such a problem then draft a response collectively. Or members of a group may write separate responses, then compare them in discussion or post or print some or all of the responses for others to compare.

■ SCALES

After a small group has discussed a problem, they might arrange their opinions along a scale, which is a graphic display of a continuum. For example, group members might range in opinions on how a parent should deal with a child's misbehavior. At the ends of the scale would be the most extreme positions on the subject they could think of, and along the line between these extremes could be arranged the opinions of the group members. Thus a scale might look like Figure 18.1. After discussing a problem and making a scale to display the positions of the group members, each person could write out his own position, stating his reasons for holding that opinion. Scales may also be used as a way of displaying the results of an opinion survey (see page 385).

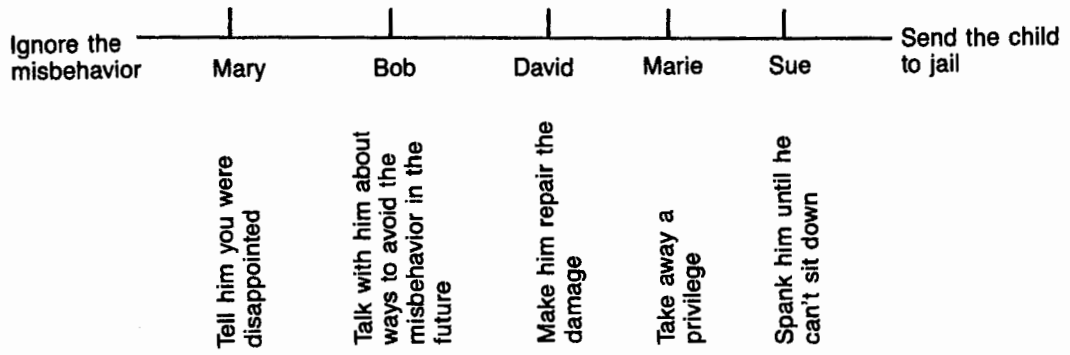
■ SCRIPTS

Experience with informal classroom drama (Chapter 5), invented dialogue (Chapter 14), and topic talk (Chapter 4) leads naturally into writing dialogues of ideas. Drama and discussion are really just different wavelengths on the same band. Drama has a higher proportion of emotion; discussion has a higher proportion of thought.

PROCEDURE

To accomplish the shift from drama to a discussion of ideas, students (1) start with a minimal situation that centers the action on a conversational topic, (2) eliminate

FIGURE 18.1 SCALE OF GROUP OPINION



stage directions, and (3) let the characters become less individual (approaching types) while the setting and topic become general. For example, one junior high student wrote a dialogue between a boy and a girl about teenage drinking with no setting or stage directions. Personal interaction was rather strong, but the characters essentially just represented two positions on drinking based mostly on gender difference. Giving the speakers generic names like Boy-Girl, Mother-Daughter, and Student-Teacher, or neutral names like A and B or One and Two, is a device that may help students disembody the dialogue and thus shift to ideas. Minimizing or eliminating stage directions also shifts dramatic dialogue to a more abstract plane.

Basic directions are to make up dialogue between two people of different minds about some problem or subject. Encourage students to write these out pell-mell, as if they were transcribing overheard conversation. This is an improvisation of ideas on paper in script format, lasting as long as the writer can sustain the interaction and his own interest. Introducing a third character may salvage a dialogue from impasse.

Though an easy way at first to write a dialogue of ideas, the duolog limits not only viewpoints but ideas within each viewpoint. Certain personalities may also lock horns too much or slide off each other. A third speaker can break up polarities and deadlocks and allow the author's mind to slip the limits of his own creations. Help students think of this strategy as a possibility in mid-writing or between an initial script and a later version. It corresponds exactly to changes made during live improvisations and can be discussed in writing groups in that same creative spirit.

Exchanged and made legible if necessary, these scripts can be acted out as is with far more interesting and entertaining results than one would think for such unrevised material. Reading these dialogues aloud in small groups can be followed also by discussion of the ideas themselves. This can reveal rigged arguments, misinformation, omitted points or points of view, illogicality, and so on, without necessarily impugning the author, who can claim not to be represented in his dialogue but will wear the shoe if it fits and benefit from it in making further use of the script. Then, of course, groups can help authors decide whether to revise their dialogues as a script, use them as a base for some other kind of writing, chuck them, or use them in some way as they are. Some interesting possibili-

ties arise if the speakers in a dialogue are judged to be different parts of one person. See, for instance, "Alter Egos" on page 326.

VALUES

Above all, writing this kind of dialogue should help a student proliferate ideas, examine matters from all sides without fear of contradicting himself, activate points of view he already has, and try out new ones. It provides a casual, expansive form for writing down thoughts before attempting to trim and organize ideas into an essay. It opens a face-saving way to abandon dogmatism and egocentricity.

Requiring students to shape thoughts into a consistent, logically continuous essay and then picking holes in their arguments retards idea writing more than it advances it. The important development for a while should be the exploring of ideas, not the constructing of watertight arguments. The fear of being illogical and inconsistent is very inhibiting when you're trying to find out what you think and when you still are only flexing your new-found logical muscles (at least in verbally explicit form). Monological essays of ideas will be better later—more thoughtful, qualified, rich, and complex—if a period of dialogical writing is allowed as preparation. To buy a neat organizational job at the price of simplemindedness is no educational bargain.

PARALLEL READING

Plato wrote nearly all of his ideas in the form of dialogues, modeled supposedly on Socrates' dialogical teaching method (the truly classic example of parlaying discussion into writing!). Many later thinkers, like Galileo, perpetuated the tradition well into the Renaissance, and indeed writers as recent as Gregory Bateson have used it as an alternative form of essay. But transcripts of public dialogues such as legislative deliberations, panels, or trials (see page 309) will provide the handiest contemporary parallels to those written dialogues of ideas. Sometimes a good way to write an editorial or other essay is to begin by reacting to the ideas recorded in a transcript.

Quite a number of interesting poems are written as dialogues of ideas. In "Dialogue of Self and Soul," W. B. Yeats expresses two inner selves in conflict, using generic names, which we find also in "The Leaden Echo and the Golden Echo" by G. M. Hopkins and "Two Voices in a Meadow" by Richard Wilbur. In "Ulysses and the Siren," Samuel Daniel lets two famous characters utter two common viewpoints. "The Clod and the Pebble" by William Blake shows how two points of view can be represented by objects as well as personages.

CONVERTING DIALOGUE TO ESSAY

One of the things that an author can do with a dialogue of ideas is convert it to monologue. For students who've spent plenty of time developing their ideas through discussion and written dialogue, this conversion may prove an excellent way to approach essay, especially if their subject at hand has benefited from this development. In the same way that summarizing a diary or journal produces a story by obliterating dates and blending events, digesting a dialogue of ideas can produce an essay by fusing the speakers' viewpoints into a perspective broad enough to contain their differences. Ideas that are at odds in the dialogue become

thoughtful considerations in the essay. Compositionally, it's all a matter of finding (1) a *framework* in which a subject may be variously viewed and (2) connective *terms* like "however," "on the other hand,"and "inasmuch as."

REFLECTION

At almost any given moment, thoughts are running through your head—a spontaneous mixture of wonderings, wishes, conjecture, generalities, opinions, and other mental productions equally difficult to name accurately. It is this mixture that we will call, for convenience, reflection. By using this term, we would like to emphasize the reflexiveness of these mental productions; they're ongoing reactions to what is happening and to what has happened. As such, they flow in and out of sensations and memories, by which they are stimulated and to which they are linked by associations of either public or private logic.

But a part of what is happening now is this flow of inner events itself; reflections prompt other reflections and thus create what we call trains of thought. In unfocused moments our thoughts wander freely as we let various sorts of inner and outer stimuli draw our minds one way, then another. This spontaneous mental life is a rich source of material for writing that we can draw from at any moment. But it doesn't of course exist for that. It is the very river of our existence or what psychologist William James long ago called the "stream of consciousness." All ideas we will ever have will come from it. Before relating it to writing, we have to respect it and work with it in itself.

■ ATTENTIONAL PRACTICES

Attention is central to learning and thinking. To what are we attending at a given moment? Voluntarily or involuntarily? Researchers at Harvard's Preschool Project found that those children later judged in school to be the "brightest, happiest, and most charming" had spent as much as twenty percent of their preschool time "staring" at some object or another, the largest amount of time those children had allotted to any activity.[5] "Staring" is gazing, a rapt absorption in something as a way to know it. This is why "to contemplate" means both "to behold" and "to think intently about."

In this most important sense, gazing should be cultivated. As a natural activity it doesn't need school. Indeed, school usually interferes with it by scheduling other activities so fully and by restricting what may be gazed upon. But teachers can foster it in two main ways. One is by individualizing activities so children can do it naturally. The other is by re-introducing it as one of several attentional practices for students to keep in mind and do on their own.

How you present these practices, as sketched below, depends much on the age of your students and on your own experience with such practices. The more you do them yourself, the readier you'll understand how to sponsor them. Lead students through them enough times for them to feel comfortable with them and to experience the benefits of them enough to continue on their own. Though the

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[5] Reported in Burton White, *The First Three Years of Life*, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall 1975).

practices can all be done concurrently, the order here would make a good order of introduction. Upper elementary and adolescent students can do them all; many primary pupils will probably have a limit on how much they can focus *inward.*

Smaller groups are better than larger, but relaxation is the key. Talking students through progressive relaxation, by focusing successively on different parts of the body, makes a good preliminary along with some deep breaths and slow exhalations. Body awareness is part of attentional development. But this is not guided fantasy, which we don't recommend if it means planting images and thoughts in someone else's mind. If lying down is feasible, that helps for relaxing, but students should sit up for the practices themselves, the spine straight but not stiff.

Allow time after each session for talking about the experience, what it may be good for, and what seems to ease or impede it. It's essential for students to feel that they can't do any of these practices wrongly—that whatever happens is good because you can learn from it, that one practice will sometimes slip into another because attention has a mind of its own, that understanding and controlling attention are *goals*, not something one can necessarily do at the outset.

GAZING

Because it looks like looking, and is directed outward, gazing is simplest and applies most to all ages. Hold an occasional session when you direct students to:

- find or bring in some object you want to contemplate.
- close your eyes and get very relaxed.
- open your eyes and gaze steadily at your object, letting yourself be drawn into it, shutting out everything else and closing your eyes for a while if you need to rest them.
- talk afterwards in small groups and then with the whole class about what you experienced gazing.

The discussion should help to understand attention in general and how, in particular, we can learn to *see* more and hence *know* more. What holds and breaks attention?

VISUALIZING

After gazing a while in some sessions, students may close their eyes, relax, and visualize the object on some "screen" in their mind. If this inner image grows dim, they open their eyes briefly to reestablish it. If other images or thoughts come to mind, they release them and refocus on the image of the object. Again, they discuss the experience afterward.

Visualizing shifts attention inward, but it brings some of the outer world in with it. This is another way of knowing the object more fully. At the same time it gives students a chance to know their own mind better also—how differently their attention may work once inward, what kinds of things influence it, and what may be done to control it. The practice should strengthen thinking, reading, and writing, since all depend on visualizing, on bringing external material inside where the mind can work on it.

WITNESSING THE INNER STREAM

Like the other practices, this is best done alone, but most students will need to start it under your direction and sponsorship until they get the idea and the point.

Direct students again to close their eyes and relax. Then tell them to do nothing but watch their thoughts, memories, sensations, etc. stream by as if these were a river and they were sitting on the bank witnessing them, not moving with them. After three or four minutes, ask them lightly how well they were able to do this, and parlay this into broader discussion of the practice. Recommend that they do this often on their own as a break when they're physically resting.

Discussion can sometimes be very interesting about why this is not easy. One may drift obliviously with the thoughts, sensations, memories, and feelings instead of watching them and thus lose awareness of them. Or the mind may want to fasten on some arresting subject to the exclusion of all else. On what? Did students find themselves trying to control the flow? Some will say they went blank. Discuss what that means and how it happens.

STOPPING THE INNER STREAM

This practice consists of deliberately trying for several minutes at first to slow down, and then suspend completely, the inner stream. Present this as the profoundest way to rest and relax. Most inexperienced people find it difficult, if not impossible, but some go blank easily. If you ask afterwards whether some devised measures to stop thinking, you'll get some interesting and revealing answers, including some reinventions of age-old attentional techniques.

FOCUSING THE INNER STREAM

This practice aims at the state most akin to the one in which writing is done. For the first sessions students might just review the day's events and note their responses to them. Then:

> Choose some subject you want to understand better, perhaps some problem you want to solve, and focus just on that by concentrating on some image or phrase or idea that represents it for you. Such a subject might be one that recurs when you try to still or witness your thoughts, or it might just be some situation, person, object, place, or idea that attracts you. Follow through in this way by giving full attention to whatever is already asking for more attention.

You might create a framework for these practices by relating them to other activities your students are familiar with that call for strongly focusing attention, like playing sports and musical instruments, building things, or doing after-school jobs. Then say that writing is another activity that you get better at by developing attention. Contemplating and visualizing make us seers. Writers are seers. Witnessing makes us aware of the unceasing productivity of the mind. Suspending this mental activity renews it later and gives us some control over it. (The verbal life is grounded in the nonverbal.) Focusing it allows us to apply it to a particular task, like writing.[6]

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[6] For more rationale, see "Writing, Inner Speech, and Mediation" in *Coming on Center*, James Moffett (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1980, 1988).

■ STREAM-OF-CONSCIOUSNESS WRITING

By risking to write whatever comes into one's head, a writer is more likely than not to get out some valuable writing material amid the pages of "garbage," as Peter Elbow calls it. His and other educators' "free writing" corresponds to this activity, though the procedure varies.[7]

PROCEDURE

Inventing an interior monologue (page 323) amounts to making up some stream-of-consciousness for another person. Some students may need to project their flow onto invented persona before they confront it in themselves. For others, writing out their own stream first may make reading and writing interior monologues easier and more meaningful. At any rate, connecting them will facilitate both. Directions are:

> Go alone to some quiet place and write down, for fifteen minutes, pell-mell, everything that comes into your head, using the first words that occur to you and without concerning yourself about grammar, spelling, form, and continuity. This should be a kind of fast note-taking to get down as much as you can of what you think, feel, and sense during those fifteen minutes. Keep the focus on the "right now" so you concentrate on what you're actually experiencing. No one else will ever see this, but it will be important for later work.

The point of quietness is to reduce sensory stimuli and encourage an awareness of inner things—emotions and backaches as well as thoughts. Perhaps the students' own rooms would be good for the first attempt. When a small group is writing a stream of consciousness, you can join them and write your own along with them. Then you can examine your writing along with the others.

One purpose of writing out the stream of consciousness is to provide each student with a sampling of his own verbalization that he can examine afterward in order to learn about putting things into words. For this purpose set up discussion with some questions that a small group can answer as they look at their own papers. With these questions as starters and the students volunteering short quotations from their writing, discussion can move into several important areas of language, semantics, and rhetoric. Here are some of the types of questions you might ask a group or put onto an activity card:

> What did it feel like to do this kind of writing? Was it difficult? Is your mind ever blank?
>
> How did you decide which thoughts and feelings to put down and which to leave out? What standard of "important" or "interesting" did you go by, since the directions indicated no topics or values or audience? Did you find yourself, despite the directions, trying to stay on a subject, find a continuity, or move toward a goal? If so, why?
>
> Did you use whole sentences or fragments? What kind of words were most dispensable? Did you paragraph? If so, why? (What kind of logic determined new paragraphs?) Did you punctuate? Since no one else was going to read this, what purpose could it serve?
>
> Does your paper jump; that is, could someone follow from one part to the next? What would prevent them? In a month, would you be able to follow it yourself? Does it have any particular beginning or end?

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[7] Peter Elbow, *Writing With Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

Students can label the contents of their paper by writing "sensation," "memories," "emotion," "fantasy," "reflection," and whatever other labels they think appropriate by the side of the original writing. Some students might have been fastened on the surroundings, some on the past, some on a dream world, and some on anticipation of coming events. Since verb tenses often indicate these different focuses—the past for memory, for example—students might mark the tenses they have used, note shifts, and determine which tense, if any, dominated. Distinguishing between the progressive form of the present, which records ongoing action, and the present tense of generalization is an effective way of distinguishing sensory data from ideas. How characteristic is this sampling of their thinking all the time? How much does it reflect the circumstances of the writing? This kind of awareness may be personally helpful to many students, and they're generally interested in this analysis because it's of their own text, although it obviously touches on universal issues.

Then comes the crucial question that pulls many of the previous questions together and that gets to the heart of rhetoric: What would you have to do to this paper to make it, first, comprehensible, and second, interesting *to someone in particular* you know (get a definite person in mind)? After they have thought this over and given some answers aloud, they may decide to make the paper comprehensible and interesting *to a larger audience*, in which case they should consider everything from word choice and punctuation to complete reorganization and reformulation of the content.

After a group has written two or three thought streams they can select one of the papers and use it for a composition. The emphasis—and that's all it is—on reflection comes now in selecting from and shaping the spontaneous papers in the way described on page 359 for memories. The students can pick out trains of thought but without disrupting the setting or necessarily eliminating the sensations that triggered them, the emotions stirred by them, or the memories that may have occurred (some of which may exemplify the general reflections).

In other words, reflections are not simply sorted out, but the weight of the writing is thrown on them by lowering sensory stimuli at the time of recording the stream and by focusing on reflections when selecting for revision. The point is to act as secretary to oneself, not consciously selecting at all, and then only later, when acting as editor, to select. The reshaping and rewriting may result in a poem or a reflective essay.

Beginning in a private verbal chaos has the great advantage of letting the students discover for themselves the reasons and ways for moving toward form, communication, and a public universe of discourse.

SAMPLE

Here's a stream of consciousness written by a tenth grader who had difficulty writing, claiming she never knew how to begin. Compared to her self-conscious and awkward language production on other occasions when she spent much more time, her stream-of-consciousness efforts flowed more naturally.

> *I want to write for the next 30 minutes straight. It's really hard to begin. I'm scared, I haven't handed in hardly any writing assignments. I'm overdue 3. (My project is going to be a writing thing. It's got to be. I can't begin. It seems like I'd go nowhere, if I started. I've got lots of things important to me. I put those in my journal, far and few, they're important nonetheless. But how do I mold them into a*

story with a plot, developed character, and a universal conflict and them, symbolism backing the whole thing up. Where do I begin ?)

I'm babysitting now and this has been a steady job, now in 2 weeks they'll be gone, it's kind of good, lately I get busier and busier on the weekends and schedules have been conflicting. I'm so glad I lost that weight before they moved. Everything, 3 yrs. is a long time. I remember the first time I was here, rocking Alexandria then a blond 18 mo. old in green feety pajamas; in a wicker chair and that was the first time I sang what later evolved into "The Song; Our Song." Froggy Went A-Courting, and this year I made her a fluffy soft frog, so she'd never, ever forget. That one summer I babysat everyday for 2 weeks she loved grapes and she'd stand by the frig. and say "bapes" which turned into "gbapes" and finally "grapes." One of the first signs of really growing up. What is really growing up? We're never finished, but people talk of it like it happened. Slam-bam-thank you ma-am. I'm grown up. Not quite, who or how could we think that? Mistake.

And now at most babysitting jobs after 5 times of babysitting the food begins to taste alike, the furniture and air get monotonous. Not here. Rare. And I remember thinking I hope I sit here again. On that first time when Bram was born, how exciting those last mos. 7-9 were. Bram was born naturally and they let me in on the whole process, everything that happened, was happening and would happen. I was fascinated. I guess my first real understanding of the miraculous complexity yet simple idea of a baby.

He was so ugly. Big ears, saggy eyes, have you seen a 3 week old kid with big purplish-black bags under his eyes? Bram looked just like he had a hangover all the time.

Now he grows up (more!) every time I see him, calls me "Kerner" [her name is Karen] just like Alexandra did.

They have a real Christmas tree. Ours is fake.

I have three brothers (no sisters). Sometimes my parents have 4 sons. Ken, 21, Harold, 18, Bobby, 13 (but he's a real, real jock, and is a whole lot bigger than me, he can press 150 lbs.) Harold is a frosh at college, Purdue. He hasn't spent the night at our house this vacation. He stays with Mike (a 28 yr. old bachelor, who went to New Trier and his track record is still up at E.T.H.S. in the field house).

Well I was sitting in the living room and I noticed Harold's stocking was turned the other way. Face forward to the back. And I thought how perfect. He really isn't a part of the Xmas. Well he ate Christmas Eve dinner with us, a grand total of 23 mins., but I thought some more and decided the stocking symbolized his being in college, "growing up" and away from the "fold." Keep going. He never was an actual part of us, too freaky, messed up, easily influenced, funny and handsome, to be one of us. All this saddened me but I left the stocking the way it was, the way it honestly had to be.[8]

This student begins with a complaint, reflects on "growing up" as she faces the end of a baby-sitting job with its memories, and finally is reminded of the Christmas stockings in her living room at home, which leads to her final reflection on "growing up," triggered by a concrete object. This stream-of-consciousness writing could provide her with good material for composing a memoir, a reflective poem, or a personal essay.

Some of the most valuable and interesting thoughts occur in association with passing objects and momentary circumstances to which they are reactions. The

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[8] From George Seidenbecker's class, Evanston Township High School, Evanston, Illinois.

connection in which thoughts arise is as important sometimes as the thoughts themselves. Consider a skylark or a Grecian urn, for example. In fact, it's often impossible to separate profound thought from the sight or sound that sets it off.

> *Lying on my bureau is my pay envelope. By the standards of the American economy it is very little. However, to me ...*

So begins the paper of a girl looking meditatively around her room. How much more interesting an opening than the pompous generalities that students dredge up for the teacher's benefit.

■ REFLECTIVE POETRY

Encourage students to write poetry based on their stream-of-consciousness writing, because most poetry depends on the kinds of personal and idiosyncratic thought and feeling that characterize a stream of consciousness rather than on the logically developed thought of dialogues of idea and transpersonal essays.

Help students see that more reflective poems are largely thought trains prompted by something seen or heard, or by the mood of a place. Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" is a beautiful example, though not necessarily the best to read first. Keats's poem is actually an interior monologue, but meditative rather than dramatic, except in the sense that the inner life can be very dramatic. The poetry follows moment by moment the movements of a man's sensibility as he stands in the odorous dark of summer shrubbery and hears a nightingale pass. Many poems conform to the immediate concatenation of sensation, fancy, and reflection. Others, like Robert Burns's "To a Mouse" and Robert Frost's "Departmental" talk to and about an animal or object that sets off thoughts, wishes, and wonderings, or perhaps broad generalizations ("The best-laid schemes o' mice and men gang oft agley [awry].").

Beginners who don't find a form of their own might try writing in one of the shorter poetic forms such as the cinquain to shape the comparatively formless material of stream-of-consciousness notes. A cinquain is a five-line poem with two, four, six, eight, and two syllables in each respective line. This cinquain by Mabel Meadows Staats is the kind that might crystallize out of reflection:

SPRING THAW

If birds
Return to build
Each spring when winter goes
Must you recall cold words and stay
Away?[9]

(See also "Formulaic Verse" and "Comparisons" starting on page 283).

At some point in exploring poems, mature students might appreciate a traditional but flexible form such as the sonnet. Let them read and try writing sonnets that consist of reflections inspired by an object, like Keats's " On Seeing the Elgin Marbles," or pure reflection, like Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much with

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[9] Mabel Meadows Staats, "Spring Thaw," from her book *Bright Quarry*.

Us." (Many of Wordsworth's poems have the quality of spontaneous reflection and are often entitled according to the time and place in which they were composed.) For students who have worked with haiku, an object or setting will not seem a strange way to begin a poem.

As a vehicle for ideas, a poem may be written as:

- an invitation
- a vision of hell
- a vision of heaven
- an invocation to a spirit or force
- an address to a public figure
- a response to a news item
- an epitaph or elegy
- a eulogy
- a celebration of an occasion
- a farewell to something or someone
- a blessing or prayer
- a prophecy or warning
- a blues or lament
- a lullaby
- a letter of advice or thanks

One of these, or others, might be just the right vehicle for a certain student to say what he has to say. Post such a list or put it on an activity card. And be sure that your students read around in good mixed anthologies of poems that offer interesting instances of these and other similar ways of writing a poem. Help them to become aware of this array of uses of poetry and of what opportunities this offers them for expressing their own ideas.

The "cloudy symbols of high romance" of Keats's "When I Have Fears That I May Cease to Be" are like the concerns and wishes for the future that adolescents want to express. And expressed as a poem, such feelings are less embarrassing. Juxtaposing disparate things along an emotional continuity is licensed, and the structures of poetry help fix this personal continuity in the public medium of language.

Most poetry is loaded with this free association of sensations, memories, fantasies, and reflections. It's multileveled. The surface structure of many poems is narrative or description, but its deep structure is idea. (See page 342 for ballads and story poems—both invented story.) We noted in Chapter 16 that true stories could be written in poetry as well as prose. Some invented dialogue is poetry. Poetry *fuses* the thing described with the reflection on it, as we said for loaded description. This kind of simultaneous expression contrasts with personal essay, which *takes off from* objects or events and reflects on them. In an essay, thought and feeling are more separately stated—unless it's a poetic essay.

■ PERSONAL ESSAY

This is the prose counterpart of reflective poetry. Much of the student stream-of-consciousness sample on page 415 is actually reflective essay—the expression of

personal thought and feeling. Students can occasionally recast a short essay, or a main idea or feeling from an essay, into a poem, or vice versa. As they work to express the same idea or feeling in both prose and poetry and other media as well—letters, diaries, proverbs, slide shows, collages, dances, songs, and so on—they test the potential of each form.

We're using the word *essay* in the original sense that Montaigne gave it, of an effort or trial to understand something or to render an idea. Personal essays don't follow any particular form, but they are informal, often in first-person. And the thoughts often remain embedded in the circumstances or setting that inspired them. Sometimes they are personal responses to public events. After doing their own stream-of-consciousness writing, students will recognize in published personal essays—sometimes whimsical, sometimes very serious—chains of thought like their own that are not meant to be proved or documented.

Many good reading selections may be culled from columns, editorials, transcripts of speeches, and books of essays. Some essayists are Jonathan Swift, Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Alice Walker, George Orwell, E. B. White, Virginia Woolf, James Baldwin, and Joan Didion. Columnists like Russell Baker, Erma Bombeck, Peg Bracken, and Ellen Goodman produce short, timely essays. Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man" illustrates generalization written as poetry.

TRANSPERSONAL ESSAY

Reflective essays should help students get a greater feeling for the difference between informal personal essays and those essays that become more transpersonal in tone and more formal in the wording and ordering of the ideas. Documentation and argumentation become major issues as the responsibility to prove and persuade assumes greater importance.

Students who have gained experience with the other types of idea writing outlined up to here in this chapter may be ready for this more intellectually structured essay. There's a continuity between personal and impersonal essay, of course. Poems like Tennyson's "In Memoriam" illustrate each at different points throughout the work, being partly lyric, partly philosophical.

The chief issue in essaying is how to assert, support, and connect generalizations. This process is both logical and rhetorical, for while the writer is classifying and syllogizing, he is also patterning and phrasing his ideas for maximum effect on a reader. The past tense of narrative will sometimes remain important for purposes of illustration and documentation. But such concreter discourse is embedded in abstracter discourse through the relation of story to statement or of instance to idea.

Journalistic essays bridge from informal to formal generalization. In the following kind, we can see a generalization in the making.

■ THEMATIC COLLECTION OF INCIDENTS

Despite its makeshift name here, this is actually an extremely common form of essay found in magazines and newspapers all the time, often as a "feature article." A reporter tells three or four incidents that all illustrate a point he wants to make about, say, what happens to ex-convicts trying to start a new life.

> Tell briefly several incidents that you think show the same thing, that illustrate a certain observation you want to make. Draw these incidents from any source you trust—memory, other people, books, and so on. State the theme only as much as you think you need to. You might use your title also to indicate your point.

Whether the writer draws the incidents from firsthand experience or from hearsay and books will probably determine whether this results in a personal or transpersonal essay. Also, replacing *incidents* by *instances* could shift the examples from events to circumstances, that is, from narrative to description. In this case, the writer might be showing how teenage girls in blue-collar or white-collar families respond to learning they're pregnant. This flexibility about choice of examples makes a natural transition from personal narrative to transpersonal generality.

This is a crucial kind of writing, because it weans the student from organization by chronology to some other organization. For many students, narrative is a kind of haven that they're reluctant to leave because chains of events have a ready-made sequence, whereas exposition requires that the student create and assert a new order of his own. He can follow a time order only when he's telling one of the incidents; since the next incident will be a new beginning, he must bridge by means of the idea. Chronologic will not hold together the examples, which may be drawn from scattered times and places; some other logic must, some categorization of experience. In what sequence is he going to place the several incidents to make his point? And how is he going to get from one incident to the next? If the incidents are summarized in a pointed enough way, so that the similarity they share is apparent, and if the author's common classification for them is also clear, the paper should be successful, at least logically.

ISSUES FOR THE WRITING WORKSHOP

Group discussion of the first drafts should test an author's classification against the understanding of the group. An effective way to do this is to use the titling device described on page 204. Further: Is there one incident that doesn't fit the theme or classification as well as the others do? Are some of the incidents summarized in such a way that their relevance is not clear? Does the order of the incidents make any difference? Would the paper be more effective if they were placed in another order? Does the author make transitions between incidents? If not, does he *need* transitions? (Would juxtaposition alone make the point?)

Does the author state the main idea in the title or in a sentence or paragraph? Where does the statement come—at the outset, at the end, or during transitions? Sometimes withholding the statement until the end creates suspense and permits the reader to make up the classification along the way. He may even have to change his classification midway as he encounters new incidents, and this could be very thought-provoking. However, if the connections among incidents are too difficult to make without guidance, then the author should probably make his statement early in the paper or use transitions to guide the reader. Some discussion about how well the examples from real life and the examples from reading go together might be profitable also.

PURPOSES

A student who masters this kind of writing should learn a lot here about that classic problem of coordinating example and statement, of illustrating generaliza-

tions. Examples are usually drawn from a level of abstraction lower than that of the statement being illustrated. Frequently, the examples are narrative. The difficulties are (1) summarizing the bit of narrative or description so that it will fit under a heading containing other bits of summarized narrative or description, and (2) finding an apt and accurate heading that can logically contain the incidents or instances assigned to it. The narrative summaries must be trimmed of irrelevance and worded abstractly enough to stand clearly as items sharing similarities with other items in their class. This is precisely what's required when illustrating generalizations in formal exposition or essay. Writing morals for fables and other highly pointed stories should help establish this relationship.

This project, furthermore, relates concept formation to composition. The student creates a class concept of his own by clumping items that he sees as instances of it. In fact, the physical model for this assignment would be to take a pile of mixed objects and sort them into several piles of like objects according to one's own notions of similarity.

DRAWING FROM READING

Students can draw the whole thematic collection of incidents from their reading experience, possibly mixing poems, plays, and fiction. The purpose, of course, is to put together one's reading according to categories of one's own by seeing similarities among events, characters, or situations. But like most of the following kinds of writing, this experience will also serve well when writing many examination essays and term papers designed to find out what students know and understand about course texts and lectures. Any student who can create a generalization and support it by instances from his own material will be able to do that with course material.

DRAWING FROM PREVIOUS WRITING

This activity holds the important possibility for students of drawing some of their incidents from their own previous writing. If they've been following this program and keeping papers in their folders, they should have a stock of narratives, some of which, in fact, would have implied or stated a generalization. These previously told incidents would need to be summarized and retold in order to fit clearly the category that would contain them.

Whenever possible, the basing of later writing on earlier writing should be encouraged. Students can look over old diaries and reportage, research, autobiography, and memoir (any sensory and memory material), cull generalizations they made, and then try some of these out in their minds. Are there other incidents from reading or real life that illustrate or substantiate the generalization? By drawing on a sensory recording, two memories, and two reading selections, one teenager illustrated how people avoid silence.

One advantage of further abstracting material they have already abstracted from recollection or investigation is that students can then understand as they never would any other way how the raw material of life is processed by stages into more and more abstract symbolizations. Another is that they can get ideas for this present paper by building on previous ones. At the same time, finally, they're building their own knowledge structures by combining firsthand experience and observation with material from other sources and thence distilling a truth from them.

■ EDITORIAL

An editorial has no particular form, but it does assert some generalization in the relatively short space that magazines and newspapers allow on their op/ed pages. Editorials vary considerably in how much they just declare and how much they document. Some consist mainly of opinion, others mainly of factual exposition. But they share purposes that require some general statement. They tend to be activist in the sense that they attempt to play some role in events and circumstances such as the news portion of the newspaper or magazine reports on. For example, editorials often comment on current trends or happenings or to what others have said about them, creating a kind of ongoing forum. Or the main statement may take the form of a proposal for some public undertaking, based on some facts and conclusions. Or an editorialist may want to influence events by persuading minds.

Inasmuch as students may be involved in current issues, this action orientation combined with the availability of editorial models can make this an attractive kind of writing. Groups can discuss timely subjects and how best to make their editorials effective for their purpose and fitting for some publication.

■ REVIEW

Few kinds of writing may touch more bases than another journalistic "department," the review. Reviews are of all sorts and about all kinds of things—from restaurants, circuses, and videos to concerts, books, and art exhibitions. This flexibility in both form and content lets students find their own ability level and interest. At the same time, reviews share a fairly common, utilitarian purpose, like editorials, that makes sense to young people: they evaluate something so that readers may decide if it's for them or not.

The reviewer may go about this in a number of ways involving various narrative, expository, and analytical kinds of discourse. He may summarize the plot of a play, for example, feed in factual background about the epoch of the action, critique the performance or the composition of the script itself, compare either with counterparts elsewhere, situate the play within sociological or artistic trends, debate the truth of the play's themes, and assess the value of the play as written and as produced. Some major essays turn a review of a book or brace of books into commentary on the whole area in which the books fall.

A student reviewer may do only one or two of these things, as indeed many professional reviewers do, but the possibilities are all there and pertain to the critical, evaluative function, which makes a review coherent even if it mixes many kinds of discourse. Consumer research too aims to help the reader sort out goods for himself, but it does this by presenting factual findings, whereas reviews depend more on personal judgment and experience. At any rate, sorting out things has high priority among young people, who need to realize what kinds of discourse they can find and create that may prove useful to them. Also, they want to know what their peers in particular think of products, performances, and resources because they believe their criteria will be closer to their own than those of another generation. So they will be good audiences for each other's reviews, as adult peers are. And the journalistic nature of reviews, like editorials and timely feature articles, makes them easy to find and to disseminate.

■ GENERALIZATION SUPPORTED BY INSTANCES

This goes a step beyond the thematic collection by developing the generalization itself more than the instances, which are more subordinated. A huge number of essays in both popular and technical publications are basically structured around a statement cast into the present tense and supported by examples. But this framework may be infinitely complicated by establishing first one or more substatements that build up to the main generalization, each of which may need to be separately supported. Or the support of some generalizations may require combining various sorts of documentation and argumentation in complex ways. But consider for the moment an essay framed by a single generalization:

> Make a general statement about some aspect of people's behavior that from your own observations seems true to you. Use a number of examples to illustrate your generalization. Draw your examples from among the things you've observed, investigated, heard, and read about that led you to this generalization in the first place.

This process essentially just shifts the ratio between instance and generality. The main purpose of it is to throw the emphasis definitely on ideas. Illustrations are distinctly subordinated, and paragraphing follows a logic inherent in the generalization. Although the task calls mainly for an assertion and examples, most generalizations break down in some way into lesser ideas or into variations of the main statement. Thus, a typical pattern would be for the first paragraph to assert the generalization and for the lead sentences of the following paragraphs to make the substatements, with follow-up sentences illustrating them. But there should be no formula for such a paper. The first paragraph might consist of an arresting example that's to be explained later, or the substatements might lead inductively up to the generalization as the conclusion of the paper.

For instances of generalizations, refer students to those such as are treated under "Single Statements" earlier in this chapter. Some they wrote or read as epigrams, maxims, or definitions might serve as the generalization for this composition and will prove much superior to "topics" of the sort usually stated in only a word, phrase, or sentence fragment. But emphasize that generalizations may come from anywhere. "What generalizations are you *assuming* as you go about your daily life? Are these really true? Test them out. Can you support them by exemplifying and reasoning?"

ISSUES FOR THE WRITING WORKSHOP

Each student paper will embrace a certain segment of the abstraction hierarchy. Some generalizations will be on a very high level of abstraction, encompassing a wide range of time and space. If a paper contains no past tense, this means that the illustrations are also generalizations, though presumably of a lower order than the main statement. The issue for the writing workshop, then, is whether such illustrations *illustrate* well enough or whether they themselves are so abstract as to require examples.

The highest point on the abstraction hierarchy in any paper will be the main assertion, and the lowest point will be the most concrete example. If the main assertion is high, such as "People have a strong need for exploration and adventure," one would expect the secondary assertions and the illustrations to run high

also, though they should still be well below the main assertion. But if the main assertion is something like "Older sisters are more confident than younger sisters"—a much more specific generalization—one would expect all the other statements in the paper not only to run below this one but to dip down into past-tense, narrative sentences, which are near the bottom of the hierarchy.

Concrete and *abstract, specific* and *general* are entirely relative terms, relative to the master statement that provides the context for the whole paper. Illustrating is translating a statement down the hierarchy. A generalization in one paper might be an illustration in another. But if the illustration is not very much farther down, it can't illustrate well. If it is too far down, it may be too trivial, relatively, to be persuasive. ("My friend so-and-so joined the Peace Corps last year because he was restless" to illustrate "People have a strong need for exploration and adventure.") The student must play up and down the abstraction ladder according to the situation, jumping farther down for illustrations, and then jumping back up occasionally for transitions or other restatements of the main idea.

As students explore these matters in discussion of their own first drafts, direct them to amend statement X, if they think it is exaggerated or "overgeneralized" or simply not true. What words, phrases, or clauses could be added that would make the statement truer in their view? Then: Do the examples fit? Are they specific enough, or are they themselves too general? Where did the author place his main assertion? Where did he place his examples? What determined the order of his paragraphs? If the order were changed, would it make any difference? Does each paragraph consist of an illustration, or are the paragraphs based on substatements? (So-called development is the breaking down of the main generalization into its variations or substatements.)

Some common faults are: letting an illustration run away into irrelevance (usually a narrative for its own sake); piling on examples that all show the same point; stringing the examples with weak transitions such as "Another example is..."; repeating the first paragraph as the last paragraph; and repeating the main generalization instead of developing it. Almost all of them stem from too simple a generalization.

Developing the main statement through qualification and variation would solve most of these faults. But bear in mind that a single or simple generalization does not necessarily invite development, and that illustrating it naturally tends toward a string-of-beads organization. That is, the sequence of documentation may not logically make a difference. But for the impact on a reader it may. With help from each other, authors can find a way of sequencing points artfully and with as much development as the main idea accommodates.

SUBJECT MATTER

The directions need not stipuate human behavior; people are simply the handiest subject to generalize about. Students can repeat this kind of writing with different subjects. Indeed, it is their interest in a certain subject that will engage students in generalization. Our discussion here is based on activity directions that merely suggest what writers do when they set out to assert and prove something. Students will produce such essays in many circumstances, depending on the purpose and audience of the project at hand.

The project might concern another course or subject area. Indeed, this sort of writing is precisely what's often required in school and college as an exam to

"cover the material" in a content course in the natural or social sciences. Our approach differs only in that *it stipulates the conceptual and compositional task instead of what the generalization is to be about.* By limiting documentation to certain kinds of scholarly or scientific sources such as certain texts, students can more specifically prepare for this kind of testing. But any experience writing this sort of essay will also prepare for this particular use of it. Ideally, students would assert some original generalizations by drawing on their own investigations and on those of professional researchers and scholars.

PARALLEL READING

Generalizations on contemporary issues and other matters abound in periodicals such as *Commentary*, *The Black Scholar*, *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Puerto Rican Journal*, *Harper's*, and the *Atlantic*. As for books, it's just a matter of students gravitating toward those on a subject of interest. Most books that are not narratives or mere catalogs are essays of this sort, but their greater length enables the authors to develop assertions into the complexities of documentation and argumentation of the next kind of essay.

■ COMBINING GENERALIZATIONS INTO A THEORY

We're using the term *theory* here in a somewhat double sense. The most important meaning is that the essays do not merely state generalizations but combine them in some syllogistic way. The secondary meaning is that sometimes the ideas are also speculative, that is, extrapolated somewhat far from fact. Both give greater play to logical argumentation all while drawing, perhaps, on large bodies of investigative findings.

PROCEDURE

In skeletal form, the main process underlying this final project can be demonstrated and carried out orally. This sort of essay is framed by one or more syllogisms.

> Take several generalizations from sources such as your previous writing, scientific investigation, folk sayings, etc. and combine them so as to conclude a further statement not evident in the original ones. Illustrate or document the generalizations.

ORAL SYLLOGISMS. To prepare for this kind of advanced essay-writing, students can hold several small-group sessions on working out syllogisms, which are series of generalizations consisting of at least two premises and a conclusion. For example, they might look at syllogisms such as these and come up with their own, modeled on the same pattern:

> All who are anxious to learn work hard.
> Some of these girls are anxious to learn.
> Some of these girls work hard.
>
> Improbable stories are not easily believed.
> None of his stories are probable.
> None of his stories are easily believed.

They can begin with a single-statement generalization they've heard, read, or written in one of their own papers, come up with another one or two on the same subject and write them under the first one. Suppose they came up with these three premises (theories build on more than two premises) which were in fact the generalizations that one teenager combined into a theoretical essay:

> Conforming is an unconscious part of growing up.
> Conformity is necessary to society.
> Conformity leads to harmful excesses such as intolerance and artificial behavior.

You or an activity card can then direct students to pretend for a moment that they all accept these propositions as true. Then they can cast them as a syllogism:

> If it is true that
> *Conforming is an unconscious part of growing up,*
> And if it is true that
> *Conforming is necessary to society,*
> And if it is true that
> *Conformity leads to harmful excesses such as intolerance and artificial behavior,*
> Then it must also be true that
> (Blank).

Further directions:

> Fill in the blank. What's the fourth statement that you conclude from the first three? Propose several possibilities and discuss which seem to follow logically. Write these down too. Are several equally valid conclusions possible? Do you think that such and such a conclusion is a true statement? Narrow down the proposed conclusions to one that some of you think is false. Does it follow from the premises? If you think it does not, go to another conclusion that you consider false but admit is logically derived. Why, then, is it false? Now return to the three premises you pretended to accept earlier. Is one false that therefore falsifies the conclusion?

Students continue to work backward and downward. That is, when an unacceptable premise has been identified, those who think it's false try to qualify and rephrase it. If others disagree with their changes, they decide what sort of evidence they would need to settle the matter. A group should do enough of these sessions to make clear the process of syllogizing and its continuity with their previous work in asserting and supporting individual generalizations.

Next they can write down and bring to their discussion groups other unconcluded syllogisms consisting of two or three premises about the same subject. The groups select one of these sets, amend the premises until they agree on them, and then discuss what conclusions might logically follow. Afterwards, a spokesperson for the group might describe what happened during the process and read the premises and conclusions to the class for feedback. Some premises will have been too unrelated to each other to conclude *anything* from, some will have yielded *several* tenable conclusions, and some will have yielded only one logical possibility.

WRITING. Next they combine and compose generalizations into a theoretrical essay. For the first attempt, students might draw as many starting generalizations as

possible from their previous writing, reading, and discussion. The purpose of this is to let them continue to build their own thought structures on the foundation of their lower abstractions. Make it clear that syllogizing is to be the heart of the paper but that it doesn't imply any particular organization. Of course, not all statement relations are completely amenable to logic—especially in the murky area of human behavior. So the limits of logic become themselves a critical consideration.

ISSUES FOR THE WRITING WORKSHOP

The following compositional issues will probably arise for commentary during revision. Should the premises be announced all at once in the beginning or fed in at intervals? Should or can they be documented simultaneously, or will they have to be documented each in turn? In what order should they be taken up? Is the order indifferent, or can one generalization be developed in some way from another? Do some premises need more documenting than others? Should the conclusion(s) be suspended until the end for climactic effect or posted at the outset to make the thread of argument easier to follow? Of course, a very complex paper might contain subsidiary syllogisms and thus two or three secondary conclusions in addition to the main one.

Project or distribute for discussion at least one legible first draft from such an effort. Read it aloud as the group follows visually, and stop for comment en route. When the audience feels that something is unclear, help them to determine whether the difficulty is in:

- the syllogistic drawing of conclusions,
- the statement of single generalizations,
- or, farther down still, the concepts contained in a generalization (definition of a word, for example; but often the premises are themselves definitions).

Both these logical problems and the compositional problems described above should be touched on enough in discussion with you to enable students at least to identify them when they encounter them in the writing workshop groups. As usual, this raising of issues is achieved by asking the audience to propose solutions for the difficulties they encounter as readers, restating their diagnosis for them when necessary.

PARALLEL READING

It's in the nature of theory and of higher thinking in general that it occurs in a particular field, not as a form unto itself, so finding appropriate reading selections is a matter of looking in fields of interest. Charles Darwin's *The Origin of Species* argues a theory on the basis of zoological information. Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media,* Karl Marx's *Capital,* Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics,* and Michael Polanyi's *Personal Knowledge* are influential books that emphasize theory.

Theoretical essay represents people putting things together for themselves in the most explicit and intellectual way. It turns their deductive powers to work on the generalizations that their inductive powers have previously distilled. In this way it caps the rational knowledge-making processes that have been crystallizing across the last three chapters. But this does not make it the goal of the curriculum.

It grows naturally out of a continuous process that goes on within people all the time whether or not they ever manifest it in speech or writing. Theoretical discourse is no more important than the other kinds we have surveyed, all of which create understanding, and some of which do it no less profoundly for doing it more artfully. The goal of the curriculum is to play freely over the whole universe of discourse.