CHAPTER 5.

CREATIVE NONFICTION ACROSS THE CURRICULUM?

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Abstract. *This chapter argues for the integration of creative nonfiction writing into WAC and WID programs. Drawing parallels to popular science writing, it contends that creative nonfiction, characterized by narrative, strong authorial presence, and associative thinking, can enhance student engagement and learning. Building upon the historical work of James Britton, Janet Emig, and others, the chapter addresses concerns regarding the use of creative writing in disciplinary contexts, and it proposes its value for fostering deeper understanding, connecting course content to broader audiences, and promoting social change through informed public discourse. Concrete examples of creative nonfiction assignments are discussed.*

It's Labor Day, and I'm in a mountain cabin near Crested Butte, Colorado. The owner had warned us to close windows at night. Tiny gnats in vast numbers are getting through screens, drawn to the light. Now it's night and I'm reading in bed, brushing bugs from pages. The book, by David Kaiser (2020), is *Quantum Legacies*. It's a collection of 20 essays by an MIT physicist, with titles like "All Quantum, No Solace," "From Blackboards to Bombs," and "Gaga for Gravitation." Kaiser explores particle and quantum physics, providing plenty of fact and theory, yes, but doing so often through stories and portraits of scientists.

Nobel laureate Kip Thorne blurbs that Kaiser's prose "sometimes soars … in a remarkable series of vignettes" (in Kaiser, 2020, cover). The reviewer from *Physics World* calls it "a breath of fresh air to see physics writing like this: lucid and friendly, sober and thoughtful, and willing to trust the reader's engagement and intelligence rather than demanding the former and underestimating the latter" (in Kaiser, 2020, cover).

The book has enough formulae and graphics to earn serious credentials, though I'm sure physics grad students would yawn. But it also has analogies and reveries. Explaining the problem of trying to identify a Higgs boson from the

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output of an accelerator, Kaiser notes, "This is a bit like trying to infer the existence of a particular long-deceased grandmother—and measure her height and weight—by sifting all the data of a national census" (2020, p. 178). Remembering how he got interested in particle physics, he recalls, "One of my favorite books in graduate school was *The Higgs Hunter's Guide* … The title made me feel like Indiana Jones" (2020, p. 179). In a discussion of relationships between the vast and the infinitesimal, Kaiser sets a scene: "Jason and Andy mused that night over burgers: Could we somehow exploit these large-scale features of the universe to test quantum theory" (2020, p. 59)? The book is a little closer to Montaignian essay than Newtonian tradition, closer to story than textbook. It's written for readers who chose to read rather than for those obliged.

There's a long vein of similar physics writing, from Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* (2010) to Gary Zukav's *Dancing Wu Li Masters* (1979). Biology has had Lewis Thomas's *The Lives of a Cell* (1974) and Jane Goodall's *My Life with the Chimpanzees* (1988). In fact, this sort of writing has been popular enough to join the Best American writing series. But it's pretty far from what we'd generally have any student try in an undergraduate science course.

Why not? Why and how might teachers in writing across the curriculum (WAC) settings assign this sort of writing, which I'll park under the umbrella of creative nonfiction? I've speculatively devised an acronym, heaven help me: CNAC or, better, "Snack." That's just plain hubris. I'm going to make a brief, high-level case for this kind of writing, aiming toward ideas for assignments that faculty might adopt in various courses.

With "creative nonfiction," I'm gesturing to a confederation of factual genres that have aesthetic, stylistic, and authorial features historically associated with fiction or poetry: narrative, image, metaphor, voice, dialogue, the whole shebang. I'm pointing to genres like memoir and personal essay, to literary journalism, profiles, place writing and so on. See, for example, my introduction to a special issue of *College English* on creative nonfiction that I guest edited (Hesse, 2003).

Three qualities of creative nonfiction are most apparent in popular science writing. First is a strong presence of story and scene. Ideas and concepts are narrativized. The writer takes readers on the drive up to the observatory or into the bar with the botanist. We see the mood of the lab at midnight. There's dialogue.

Second, and related, ideas are associated with people who function like characters. We see how they look and talk and dance or drink. We learn about childhoods or grad schools, perhaps through interviews with friends or colleagues. In the case of personal essays, the person at the autobiographical reflective center is the first-person narrator, who reports, reacts, and reflects. People in creative nonfiction figure as agents or reagents, as refractors and filters, not as windexed clear glass.

Third, the writing is often associational, sometimes even digressive. A fact or idea gets connection to other facts or ideas, sometimes mediated by experience or memory. The writer values connections, even taking leaps in the name of creating interest, for themselves as well as others. So writing about a new image from the Webb space telescope might take me to watching the Milky Way above a Crested Butte cabin on a gnat-filled black night. Writing might take me to 1968 and an Iowa backyard, lying on a blanket beside my mother to watch the Pleiades meteor shower.

CONCEPTUAL ROOTS OF CNAC IN WAC

There's a modest tradition of creative writing to foster writing-to-learn. Its roots go back at least as far as research that James Britton and his colleagues did with British children in the early 1970s. They theorized a spectrum of writing roles ranging from the writer as participant, producing transactional discourse that operates in and on the world, to the writer as spectator, producing poetic discourse (note "poetic" here is larger than poetry). The spectator role is to observe, evaluate, and create. Britton writes:

> In a very general way the distinction between the roles of participant and spectator is the distinction between work and play: between language as a *means* (to buy and sell, to inform, instruct, persuade and so on) and an utterance for its own sake, no means but an *end*: a voluntary activity that occupies us for no other reasons than that it *preoccupies.* (1975, p. 81)

Between transactional and poetic discourse, between getting things done and creating artifacts, Britton posits expressive discourse, writing to create meaning for the writer, with only the logic and conventions the writer needs. Writers beginning in expressive discourse may, as they move toward external readers and their expectations shape writing to meet transactional or poetic conventions. Or they may fashion expressive discourse for public, not only personal dimensions, in which "the writer chooses to approach his reader as though he were a personal friend, hence revealing much about himself by implication in the course of dealing with his topic" (Britton et al., 1975, p. 90). This, I'll observe, is the realm of the personal essay, one of the genres available for CNAC, as I noted above. If I were writing a CNAC-ish personal essay about Britton's ideas, I might include a story about drinking beer with Britton in 1979 or 1980, at George's Buffett on Market Street in Iowa City, where he'd come to teach in the Iowa National Endowment for the Humanities seminar. In approaching the piece this way, I'd be invoking the qualities of story, character, and digression I described above.

The centrality of expressive discourse as a productive learning space got taken up early by Janet Emig, and the whole tradition of writing-to-learn. By the time of gospel writers like John Bean, expressive writing was mainly groundwork for instrumental ends, important for learning and perhaps paving the way to transactional purposes. Poetic discourse, which Bean reduces to creative writing, is almost absent. While Bean (2011) includes "creativity exercises," there are only three among twenty-five examples. There are more fully developed examples elsewhere, obviously, as with Art Young's (1982) consideration of the poetic functions of language. Poetic discourse needn't manifest as poetry, of course, though in a 2003 article, Young and three colleagues explained how and why it might.

There's an unfortunate complexity in the double ways that the term "expressive" has come to refer both to aim and artifact. On the one hand, as aim, expressive indicates a self that produces language for its own needs and interests, sufficient for the writer as sole reader, either as a final product (like a diary), or as a private means to public ends (like a first draft on the way to a published final). On the other hand, an artifact deemed expressive is recognized as having autobiographical or poetic elements; the appellation through much of the 1980s through 2000s was frequently derisive, expressive perceived as self-indulgent when more important writing needed to be done. In contrast, I suggest, the expressive artifact may have fallen short of its rhetorical situation (often by focusing more on the writer's experiences or thinking rather than other content) or failed to achieve an expected quality for either transactional or poetic discourse. The text remained in the middle of Britton et al.'s (1975) continuum rather than progressing to either of reader-based prose's ends. A crucial WAC tenet is to acknowledge that such writing is doing important work for learning, even if falls short rhetorically.

"Creative" works, including creative nonfiction, have their origins in the expressive aims of language, writers trying to sort out/constitute their encounters with the world through language. They may productively (at least for their writers' learning or personal needs) fail to meet standards for successful poetic artifacts: stories, poems, screenplays, multimodal performance works, personal essays, literary journalism, and so on.

There has been relatively little about creative writing generally in the WAC literature, only a fraction of which addresses creative nonfiction particularly. Recently, Alexandria Peary (2015) and, especially, Justin Nicholes (2022) have described most thoroughly the case for creative writing across the curriculum, but they've said little about creative nonfiction forms. When you think about it, creative nonfiction's absence is somewhat remarkable. You might actually expect fact-based narrative would be fecund for content-driven writing in

WAC courses, especially given examples from disciplinary scholars writing memoirs, journalists writing profiles of scholars, and so on. I speculate that there've been three reservations. First, obviously, is a general reluctance about creative work in the serious business of WAC. If engineers, psychologists, or art historians face a tough enough time making space for writing, filling that space with forms that seem to belong elsewhere in the curriculum is a tall ask. Second, within creative writing, nonfiction has been less defined for many WAC professors than have been other creative genres; they have a clearer sense of what poems are than of personal essays. Third I speculate that straight out poetry, fiction, and drama are not only more familiar but also safer. If you're having students write something other than straight academic prose, then poems or short stories oddly present fewer risks; they're so dramatically different from conventional academic discourse that they bear warning labels, as it were. Nonfiction does so less clearly.

Creative nonfiction's absence is perhaps a vestige of a phenomenon that Jim Porter (1986) described in his landmark article, "Intertextuality and Discourse Community." Porter described writers first as pre-socialized with respect to a discourse community, kept outside its ropes. Next writers are socialized, that is, able to perform its conventions sufficiently well to gain membership. A precept of WID is helping students acquire the rhetorical and epistemological moves to mark themselves as players in a disciplinary orchestra, even if last chair second violin. Some fewer, finally, are post-socialized. This last level is reserved for some few who have earned such status as to permit them to flout convention, including through creative nonfiction genres. I'm thinking of writers like Stephen Jay Gould or Neil DeGrasse Tyson. Having students write creative nonfiction may violate some unstated decorum; they haven't passed through expected levels. The more imaginative stuff is reserved for the accomplished insiders holding tacit licenses to tell stories of the field and themselves. It's parallel to crediting student sentence fragments only after students have demonstrated facility with traditional sentence expectations. Rightly or wrongly, we expect students to credential through customs. Maybe it's hazing. I remember my high school calculus teacher, Joe Beck, making us learn a tedious method of solving certain differential equations, only later to offer shortcuts. We were told it was good for us. But maybe it was better for the field of mathematics.

BENEFITS OF CNAC

With that background, let's consider more directly some benefits for CNAC. Surely, we need better reasons than humoring belletristic sorts like me. Peary

(2015) believes creative writing supports different or hybrid learning styles, asserting that "creative writing is an invaluable transferrable skill; students who have taken a creative writing course see improvement specifically in the areas of critical thinking, the maintenance of a healthy writing process, and close reading" (p. 196). I offer three more reasons.

Cognitive Growth

WAC's fundamental promise has been that compelling or inviting engagement through writing inevitably builds learning. Creative writing's contribution is to have students remove course material from usual disciplinary rhetorical situations, then make use of them in imaginative contexts. For example, here are two conventional creative writing WAC assignments:

> Write a scene involving two characters having coffee. One of them wants to ban the novel *The Hate You Give* from a high school library. The other believes the book belongs there. Among things you'll need to establish is the relationship between these characters prior to this conversation.
>
> Write a poem that uses the following words: mycelium, rhizome. You might for example have your poem describe a family or a set of relationships, with the target words serving as metaphor for dynamics among people.

Scholars who have advocated creative writing across the curriculum have focused mainly on writing-to-learn. One challenge I see is the tension between addressing course content and creating an artifact of reasonable quality. Artistic considerations vie with facts and concepts, especially as one moves from expressive to poetic discourse. Making a good artifact can become more seductive than grappling with a concept. Characters and images are sexier than mitochondria, so professors might rightly worry if students drift too far from course content. Creative nonfiction may keep students on a better course, as first-person works like essay and memoir introduce the variable of braiding content with lived experience. Rather than materials or ideas important to students "externally," as things to be tested or as elements of fictions, some creative nonfiction genres ask writers to combine ideas with aspects of their own lives. A common assignment strategy is to have students apply a theory or study to a scenario, for example, "How might a neighborhood group use the broken windows theory of crime to argue for better enforcement of traffic laws for speeding and stop signs? And how might police reply?" Creative

nonfiction takes that assignment practice a step further, by drawing on student experiences and stakes. In a section below, I've included two example types of assignments, but for now, consider two examples that invoke memoir or personal essay.

> The psychology literature generally cites four styles of parenting: permissive, neglectful, authoritative, and authoritarian. Which style do you think you experienced growing up? Your challenge is to tell one or more stories from your own childhood that illustrate your thinking. Tell them in a way that is compelling to your readers, creating one or more scenes, for example, that let them understand your circumstances. Of course, you'll also need to help them understand the parenting style as the scholarly literature characterizes it.
>
> I've given you two groups of paintings made during the Victorian period, one Pre-Raphelite and the other "genre" paintings. Which group do you like better? You'll need, of course, to describe a painting or two as examples and why they appeal to you, and you may find it helpful to contrast with a work from the other group that you don't like as much. But here's the challenge. What from your own life experiences might account for your choice?

Communicating to Popular Audiences

Communicating effectively within disciplines matters, of course. For readers planted in a particular field, obliged by circumstance to read its texts, writing that's direct, jargoned, just-the-facts-ma'am, maybe both sufficient and desirable. Sure, the insider-to-insider technical writing of music theory or political science or engineering may benefit from metaphor or analogy in the name of clarity. But such stylistic flourishes are transactional. Attention is built in.

But what about audiences who aren't obliged? What about readers of the *New York Times* science Tuesday section? I expect a big WAC challenge is having students write for wider publics. That the work of WAC should spread beyond the academy has gained increasing attention within our field. The comprehensive retrospective "Fifty Years of WAC" heralded "WAC as a force for social change," an outward gaze I support (Palmquist et al., 2020). Even as WAC contends in the academy with concerns of race, class, sex, gender, climate and so on, it should also contend in the world with what broad publics know and understand about physical and social realities.

Higher education increasingly calls for professors to work as public intellectuals, climbing beyond protected disciplinary boxes. I know firsthand that explaining the limits of machine scored writing to a *Washington Post* audience—in 750 words—is a far cry from talking to fellow disciplinary insiders. I suspect we don't trust undergraduates with that sort of writing. I think that's a mistake. For most students—and especially those not headed to grad school—learning high level conventions of a discipline has less personal and civic payoff than being able to use disciplinary knowledge in broader life situations. Yes, there's intellectual value in perceiving how a field's epistemology is manifested through its rhetoric and vice versa, and that value is best achieved by actually writing. I'm not suggesting creative tasks should replace all disciplinary strategies.

But the practical knowledge crisis we face in the 2020s is not within disciplines but in how academic knowledge is taken up—or, rather, not—by public spheres. Having students write for those audiences requires the tools of narrative, scene, and voice as much as the accurate presentation of facts and concepts. We should have students consider and practice strategies to make readers care about things they're learning. I'm not just meaning tasks like, "Explain photosynthesis to your grandmother" or "Explain to your boyfriend Martin Luther's theological objections to the Roman Catholic Church." Going beyond such rhetorical situations means deploying some of the techniques of creative nonfiction, whether literary journalism or personal essay: story, character, style.

Consider how such approaches to writing for popular audiences might be useful in some example tasks: 1) explain important recent applications in CRISPR; 2) what's at stake between "scientific" and "whole language" approaches to teaching reading; 3) explain what drives immigrant approaches on the American southern border; 4) explain the relationship between wages and inflation in the American economy. Myriad other academic topics should matter to audiences who aren't obliged to read about them, but attracting those audiences means making them interesting. This often means leading with stories of scholars or scenes of places where concepts are enacted, then moving into the scholarly literature: story-coating, not sugar-coating. (That said, I'm surely not naïve about widespread reading habits in a fractured, bunkered 2026 social media terrain.)

The need to have student writers (and their professors) write for audiences beyond disciplinary communities is essential. In his very smart contribution to the special issue of *The WAC Journal*, focusing on WAC at 50, Paul Cook (2023) describes the need for what he calls "misinformation across the curriculum" (p. 115), addressing the crisis in fake news and sham facts across society. I'd take Cook's remedy one step beyond the fine recommendations he makes, calling for taking disciplinary knowledge into the world beyond classrooms and scholarly publication. The rhetorical tools of creative nonfiction are instrumental.

Connection

Creative nonfiction can embed engagement in students, making them care differently about a subject matter by making relationships between it and other aspects of their lives. This is an old-fashioned liberal arts ideal, I'll confess. But it's important (and hard) to have students both perceive discrete coursework as building career skills and content knowledge, yes, but also as building identities, their own habits of being shaped by all manner of knowledge whose value is not only in exchange or credential but also in connective formation. Creative nonfiction figures writers as makers, with students as first-person agents of meanings. Joan Didion (2009) famously wrote that we live by the imposition of a narrative line on the shifting phantasmagoria of experience, and surely that experience might and must include that gained in school.

For many years I've taught a general education capstone course, "Mountains: Ecologies and Imaginations," in an Advanced Seminar (ASEM) program I developed. All graduating seniors at the University of Denver are required to take an ASEM, courses designed to focus on topics from a multidisciplinary perspective, for students across the university. My own course typically has students from engineering to art, accounting to sociology. ASEMs are writing intensive, requiring over 6,000 words of prose, a substantial proportion of it revised after instructor feedback. The course description of "Mountains: Ecologies and Imaginations" begins, "Why are people drawn to mountains? What geological and biological features account for our interest, and how might the psychology and philosophy of aesthetics explain why mountains have multiple uses and effects, recreational to religious? And what are the economic and ecological consequences of this attention?" For three main writing projects in the course, I give students a choice among nine alternatives, ranging from analyzing specific case studies that pit development against preservation, to analyzing how mountains are depicted and used in popular culture (Ford truck commercials are fertile ground), to creative nonfiction options. Here are two of them:

> Write your own memoir about an experience or set of experiences in the mountains. Tell a story or a series of related stories that descriptively recreate your experience(s), so that readers can get a descriptive sense of what you saw, heard, did, thought. That last element is important. Readers should get a sense of what the experience meant to you, why it was important. You can include overt reflection, of course, but I encourage you to do this with some degree of artfulness. Some degree of showing, not telling is often useful. Please note that explicit and direct comments are fine. Just be thoughtful and

> engage readers as you write. Photographs are welcome as part of this piece.
>
> Take a trip to the mountains and write about it. Think of yourself as a journalist/memoirist on assignment. Pick out a place and take a hike or a stroll. Bring a notebook and camera and record plenty of details and impressions: of the landscape, the plants, animals, other people, your thoughts along the way. Emulate the kind of writing that George Cotstantz does in *Ice, Fire, and Nutcrackers: A Rocky Mountain Ecology*.

Invariably, students choose a creative nonfiction project as one of their three. They think it's the easy route, but they learn otherwise. Still, they're highly invested. The position of creative nonfiction writer gives them a kind of agency that they don't otherwise feel they have, and they get to be like many of the writers we're reading in the course.

EXAMPLE TYPES OF ASSIGNMENTS

What kinds of assignments might disciplinary faculty make? Let me offer two examples. Providing students some examples of the genres they're pursuing will help them. It should go without saying that few students will achieve publishable standards in the strictures of a course term. Encourage excellence but be happy with serious efforts in the direction.

Option 1. A *New Yorker*/literary journalist approach. Have students write about course material as an outside writer looking in, a reporter creating a feature article that simultaneously explains a concept but does so by portraying the setting in which that concept is being taught and learned. (Of course, a more straightforward news story assignment is also a salutary approach; I'm just focusing on CNAC). Here are directions:

> Portray a course topic in the form of a feature article for a widely-read serious magazine. You have to get the subject matter right, of course, but you'll also have to solve the challenge of making this interesting for readers who don't have to read it. One approach is through narrative, embedding the information in the story of the class. What's the classroom like? How about the students? Might you interview some? What are they like? What's the class atmosphere? How does the professor dress, move, talk? What images can you create for readers? Include quotations or summaries from class meetings or readings. Perhaps even do some extra readings

> for context—or talk with friends in other sections or other schools to see how they learned this material. Through all of this, feel free to share, first person, your own perceptions and reactions. *Illustration*. Focusing on the presentations, discussions, and readings in your psychology class, write about how college students understand and respond to current research about the Big Five personality traits.

Option 2. Write a personal essay. This option asks students to connect course content with something in their experiences or perspectives beyond the course, perhaps using the content as a point of departure. Here are possible directions:

> Write a personal essay that embeds at least one idea/concept from this class into your life beyond the course. You might focus on something that surprised you or changed your thinking, perhaps telling about your previous thinking and how you came about it, then narrating the change. You might explore your response to an idea or a reading, beginning with "like" or "dislike" or "it personally matters" or "it personally doesn't" or "it connects" or "it doesn't" before trying to figure out and explain why. In other words, what in your own life or outlook on the world may connect with this idea—or not—and how? Of course, you'll need to explain the idea, perhaps from course meetings or from readings. Can you create scenes that illustrate who you are, how you got there, and what this might have to do with the topic? Additionally or alternatively, you might explore what you—or others—might do with this knowledge. You might consider how others—including a friend or family member—might process this idea differently and why. *Illustration*. Write a personal essay that engages the ideas in Marina Andrijevic et al.'s findings in their 2020 *Nature* article "Overcoming Gender Inequality for Climate Resilient Development."

EVALUATING CREATIVE NONFICTION IN WAC SETTINGS

Inevitably, the question arises, "How do I respond to student creative nonfiction?"—or at least I hope the question is framed as "respond," not simply "grade." Perhaps I'm a romantic naively asserting that response doesn't require evaluation, let alone grades. A basic menu of topics can serve as heuristics for responding,

with faculty selecting as many or few as made practical by the assignment, their own interests, or time:

- What did I find most interesting?
- How accurately, fully, and adroitly did you render the subject matter?
- What was my sense of the voice of the piece, of the personality or character that comes through?
- Where did I want more—or less?
- Where did you take risks—or avoid them?
- How well did the narrative, descriptive, reflective elements of the piece interact with the subject matter?
- What questions did I have? What opportunities did I see?
- How do I think other readers, might react to this piece, especially readers who aren't experts in this content or aren't obliged to read it?

One could, of course, build a response rubric around these questions or, going a step further, assign to some of them criteria for grading. I appreciate the concerns of biologist Jerry Waldvogel, who had his students write poems for compelling reasons and effects but who felt, "I did not feel qualified to critically evaluate their poetry as such. My grading criteria were thus basic spelling and grammar, scientific accuracy, and evidence of both critical and creative thinking" (Young et al., 2003, p. 26). Twenty years later, we do better than basic spelling and grammar. We can help colleagues unpack "evidence of both critical and creative thinking" in creative nonfiction, if we need to emphasis grading in addition to responding—or instead of it. (I could make an argument why we don't, but I'm a realist and pragmatist.)

For example, if I were building a rubric to unpack Waldvogel's "creative thinking," I'd create criteria like this, depending on the nature/genre of the task assigned.

- **Narrative Elements**
  - 1–2 Absent or simply perfunctory
  - 3–4 Tells what happened, with a straightforward recounting of events
  - 5–6 Inclusion of one or more scenes, places where the writer uses description, imagery, or reflection to dramatize and render specific moments
  - 7–8 Well-crafted combination of story and scene, engaging readers
- **Character/Voice**
  - 1–2 The piece sounds fairly "disembodied," lacking authorial presence

    - 3–4 The writing is personalized, coming from an individual
    - 5–6 The writer is engaging, using reflection, disclosure, insight and style to present an interesting persona
- **Connection**
    - 1–2 Creative and content elements exist largely independent of one another. "Here's my story. Here's some content."
    - 3–4 There are attempts to connect creative and content elements so readers see why they're together
    - 5–6 The piece seems relatively organic in form, with seams between elements largely invisible

One barrier for colleagues across campus in responding to creative nonfiction assignments is a lack of conscious familiarity with genres in their own fields. Professional development activities should include WAC leaders providing some examples—and having faculty gather examples themselves. Leaders should help colleagues learn how to read CNAC.

LAST THOUGHT: FOR WRITING TEACHERS

The examples above sketch kinds of assignments that non-English faculty might consider for courses across the curriculum. I'd like to close with a reversal of sorts: the situation for faculty teaching writing classes in English departments or writing programs, especially in first-year courses or electives specifically focused on creative nonfiction.

As a bridge to WAC, we might invite students to do some CNAC projects with disciplinary content as source material or points of departure. Rather than only having students write about their experiences or current issues, we might challenge them to make interesting the knowledge they're encountering elsewhere in their studies: a reading, field work, a lecture. If writing is to be a liberal and connective art, as I think it should, then proponents of CNAC should not just push themselves into other disciplines. We should make room for slices of those fields in our own writing classes. We should show students how writers for centuries have used "content" knowledge to shape personal essays and other literary forms.

Nearly fifty years ago, I read Thomas's (1979) essays in *Lives of a Cell* in Carl Klaus's "Art of the Essay" course at The University of Iowa. I remember being fascinated by science given narrative energy through that made it fascinating. But I also remember having a wider writing world open with recognition that creative nonfiction needn't develop merely out of the life I happened to live but also out of encounters with phenomena and ideas that needed making alive to myself and other readers.

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