

CONNECTING WITH STORIES THROUGH WRITING

by

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INSPIRATIONS AND INFLUENCES

"Their story, yours, mine -- it's what we all carry with us on this trip we take, and we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (30). So Robert Coles quotes William Carlos Williams in his book The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination. By narrating the story of my Master's Project, I have gained knowledge about the trip I have taken as a reader, writer and teacher so far. I have learned from my students by hearing the stories they carry on their trip. More than ever now, I respect their stories and story's importance in their lives.

Story had long played an important role in shaping my life. From the time my mother read me Dr. Seuss, and taught me to read when I was four, and throughout my years as a bookworm and writer in school, stories made a huge impact on my life. I'm sure it was during those developmental years moving from Laura Ingalls Wilder to Hermann Hesse that my goal to become an English teacher evolved.

It was after two of those years teaching that I encountered Joseph Campbell, who seemed to be articulating much of what I felt was true about story. After seeing Bill Moyers's video series, The Power of Myth, with Campbell on PBS, I had some interesting conversations with my brother, Mike, about heroes and "following your bliss." He then sent me a copy of Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces. You could say my project began with Campbell and his popularization of the notion that myth plays an important role in our lives today. That may be what first brought my ideas about the significance of story to consciousness for me. Since reading this classic, I have been



acutely aware of the recurring patterns, often a heroic quest, which exist in all stories, and even in the narrative text of individual lives.

Being able to see this recurring pattern in the narrative of my own life has helped me to create meaning for myself. I began my quest after graduating from high school at age eighteen; already the single parent of a one-year-old boy, I was determined to get through college with a degree which would enable me to teach English. I wanted to become an English teacher because I knew what a powerful force reading and writing had been in getting me through many hard times. After attaining this goal, it became my quest to give my students these same tools, reading and writing, to help them shape their lives.

I've begun to view the heroic quest as one in which we all engage at some level as we grope for self-realization amidst the struggle of the human condition. I became increasingly aware of stories' importance, and I began to notice how that importance revealed itself through connections made between stories we encounter, and stories we share. From there, I devoted myself to the study of the significance of story by searching for ways in which its importance revealed itself through connections. Because I am a teacher, I wanted to search to discover how those connections were made by my students in my classroom. In the seven years I've been teaching, I've worked with my students to discover the best means to achieve my goal for them. As I fumbled through these trials, I crossed a threshold into reader-response theory and discovered a reader's personal response to another's story could provide a way for the reader to tell and even write about her own story. I determined that this could create a reading/writing connection I wanted to better understand.

My quest began informally, as I worked to make my classroom a place where those connections could flourish through the use of talking, listening, reading and writing.

This is the story of how my search developed into the Masters' project I am now sharing with you. My story includes when, why and how the importance of story came to the forefront of my consciousness, and helped me to realize how fundamental story is to life.

My newly gained awareness of story's importance was reinforced by the work of Sam Keen and Anne Valley-Fox in their book Your Mythic Journey: Finding Meaning in Your Life Through Writing and Storytelling. In the book's preface, Keen writes, ". . . our individual and communal lives are shaped by dramatic scenarios and 'historical' narratives that are replete with accounts of the struggle between good and evil empires: our godly heroes versus the demonic enemy" (xi). I realized that communication, at some basic level, is the way humans make meaning in their lives through the sharing of our stories with one another.

Although the realization was a new one to me, the general concept was not. Literacy had been something I had devoted myself to for some time both as an English student and teacher. Using writing as a means of making discoveries was an idea first introduced to me by Donald Murray in his book A Writer Teaches Writing, where he wrote:

If you accept this profession -- this calling, this vocation -you have apprenticed yourself to a lifetime of learning. Neither you nor your students learn to write. You will use writing as a way of learning, a way of discovering and exploring, of finding what you may have to say and finding ways in which you may say it (5).

But I am not just a writing teacher. The literature I use in class is a means of making personal discoveries as well. A relationship exists between writing and reading that I was just beginning to comprehend. Even though I was only starting to understand this connection, I unknowingly applied it when I read another of Murray's books,

Expecting the Unexpected. After I read Murray's self-analysis "Response of a laboratory rat -- or, being protocolled," I embarked on a project in which I studied my own writing processes (271-275). While writing about a unit I use in my ninth grade English classroom, "Personal Anthology: the Research of Self", I did an analysis of my own writing process. I learned that I resist the self-knowledge that accompanies any new writing project, but that once I do begin, the learning isn't nearly as painful as the anxiety which precedes it (Daley 22-25). What didn't occur to me, consciously anyway, was the connection which had occurred between what I had read -- Murray's story, and what I then decided to write -- my story. I did not recognize the reading/writing connection based on my response to Murray's article which influenced the paper I then wrote.

Connecting my experiences with writing to my interest in stories slowly evolved after a summer spent carefully reading Robert Coles' The Call of Stories: Teaching and the Moral Imagination, in which the significance of story's vital role in the lives of those he encounters is made poignantly clear. Coles' moving account of how he used story to work with mental patients and instruct medical students unveiled how important stories had been in influencing me throughout my life. While Coles described the impact stories had on others, I pictured myself and the particular stories which had shaped my life. I looked back over my reading history and recalled that the stories which had really influenced me were those I could relate to at a personal level. Could the same be true of the students I teach in my classroom? If it is true, how would it reveal itself? I then wrote "Where Narrative Knowledge Resides," a rationale for the use of reader-response theory in the classroom based on my own experience as a reader. Through writing this piece, I discovered that "for students, what is going on in a story must be relevant to their lives outside of school if it is to have any learning value" (Daley 12-13). I continued my

study of reader-response theory by reading as many of the texts on the subject as time would allow.

K.M. Newton's chapter on "Reception Theory and Reader-Response Criticism" in Interpreting the Text gives a critical overview of the methods of literary criticism that give the reader a role in shaping and transacting with the text. This chapter was a good starting place as many important critics in this movement are cited, which led me to the work of I.A. Richards. Early in the reception theory movement, Richards' Principles of Literary Criticism reconciled science, psychology and art as they applied to literature and its criticism. Both of these critics support my belief in the reader's importance in making meaning for herself in the text.

Newton had written "in trying to explain how and why his respondents viewed the stories as they did, Holland stipulates that all readers have the same general motive, namely, to recreate their own identity with the materials provided by the story" (116). So, I next looked at Norman N. Holland's work which brings both literary understanding and psychological research to bear on his case studies of five student readers in 5 Readers Reading. I was learning that researchers had already been studying the connection between stories and students' lives that I was now interested in.

David Bleich convincingly argues in his work Subjective Criticism that in this life-world, reality is defined subjectively, making each individual learner responsible for contributing to the pedagogical community. Bleich's work spurred me to continue my quest to use my understanding of these works to attempt such a contribution.

I had not yet read the contemporary work of Louise M. Rosenblatt who popularized the concepts of reader-response theory in The Reader, the Text, the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work, so while on a plane en route to Seattle, I finally learned that Rosenblatt's theory discriminates between two types of reading,

"effereant" and "aesthetic," while describing the transactional view of reading, in which the reader plays a vital role. Rosenblatt's theory lends credence to the aesthetic role of reading, which is an important element in narrative knowledge-making. I concluded my look into reader response by reading Is There a Text in This Class?, by Stanley Fish. Fish's work reinforced the research I had encountered with the assertion that there is never just one definitive, unchanging text, but a structure of obvious meanings subject to individual interpretations. The structure Fish notes could allude to the recurring patterns Joseph Campbell had described, while Fish points out that interpretations are dependent upon the reader's background of experience.

I began to notice that the writers of original works also acknowledged their readers' important role. Nancy Mairs, in her personal narrative, Remembering the Bone House: an Erotics of Place and Space, invites the reader to substitute her "spaces" with the spaces from our own memories, when crossing the threshold into her life, to cross the threshold into our own, and in reading her story, create ours as well (11). Is that invitation always there when we hear or read a story? Other writers also recognize the reader's essential role in giving their text meaning. In an interview Maya Angelou tells George Plimpton, "The greatest compliment I receive is when people walk up to me on the street or in airports and say 'Miss Angelou, I wrote your books last year and I really -- I mean I read . . .!' That is it: that the person has come into the books so seriously, so completely, that he or she, black or white, male or female, feels, 'That's my story. I told it. I'm making it up on the spot.' That's the great compliment" (Plimpton 181).

Perhaps Ms. Angelou would then consider it a compliment that I continued my self-study by using reader-response theory to write a critical paper on Angelou's text, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. In my paper "Growing Up White in the Northwest: A Reader-Response to Maya Angelou's I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings," I point out

where events from Maya's life parallel my own background of experience, and give the text personal meaning to me. In the process, I not only respond to Angelou's story -- I write my own. While reading Angelou's first autobiography I engaged so thoroughly with the novel's central character that I was ultimately able to shape and make sense of my own life. The struggle I experienced with my female identity and sexuality, and its resultant early pregnancy and young motherhood, took on new significance when viewed through the brilliant storytelling lens of Angelou as she narrates Maya's heroic struggle. I saw first-hand how my personal response to this story, coupled with my written response to it, created a connection that made my life gain meaning. Thus my interest in reading/writing connections was officially born!

I had read "The Winds of Change: Thomas Kuhn and the Revolution in the Teaching of Writing" back at about the same time I was reading Donald Murray. At that time, I didn't recognize why, in 1982, it had been considered so ground breaking. Maxine Hairston compared changes which were occurring in the teaching of writing to Thomas Kuhn's scientific *paradigm shift*; or, "breakdowns that occur when old methods won't solve new problems" (76). Over the last decade since Hairston published her article, the restructuring of education, especially in the field of language arts, would support her comparison, and I now better appreciate her theory. The paradigm shift Hairston alludes to had not yet occurred for me personally. More time and knowledge were still necessary before my paradigm would shift.

As I was learning new ways to confront the problem of answering my questions about story I took some advice from Hairston to heart. Hairston admonishes, "we have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible process, rather than the easy thing, evaluate the tangible product" (84). Since these processes are occurring out of sight, Hairston agrees with Linda Flower, we need to "infer much about what is going on beneath the surface"

(85). I believed that much of what is going on is the writer's personal connection to what they know of story.

I recognized that Hairston says much the same thing Donald Murray said only a few years later, "One point that is becoming clear is that writing is an act of discovery for both skilled and unskilled writers; most writers have only a partial notion of what they want to say when they begin to write, and their ideas develop in the process of writing. . . . It is messy, recursive, convoluted, and uneven" (85). In her article, Hairston is focusing on the process of writing. Still, in her conclusion, Hairston makes a point of advising that we preserve some early methods, and high standards for the finished product. In order to do so, Hairston suggests that "we also need to continue giving students models of excellence to imitate" (88). This sharing of models for the sake of imitation suggests a connection between reading and writing that, at this point, had not yet been fully explored. I continued my search to find record of such exploration in the literature.

Janet Emig's "The Web of Meaning" discusses four languaging processes: listening, talking, reading, and writing. Although she discusses the pairing of reading and writing the correspondences Emig points out are between learning and writing. "The Web of Meaning" still does not address the relationships between the four languaging processes, or take the opportunity to discuss any connection between reading and writing. Emig's essay still opens, as she calls it "a crucial line of inquiry" (130). Without opening these lines, further work exploring reading/writing connections may not have been possible.

It was while I was reading Robert Coles' story that I encountered Jerome Bruner, who probes deeply into the psychology of the relationship between reading and writing in Actual Minds, Possible Worlds. I looked back at Bruner's book again recalling that he points out that the "second step in literary analysis is rarely taken. . . . we may still wish to

discover how and in what ways the text affects the reader and, indeed what produces such effects on the reader as do occur" (4). In chapter two, "Two Modes of Thought," Bruner explains that "discourse must make it possible for the reader to 'write' his own virtual text" (25). Therefore, when an author creates a narrative, it does not elicit a standard reaction from the reader. The reaction comes from whatever is most stimulated from the reader's collected imaginations. "One cannot hope to 'explain' the processes involved in such rewriting in any but an interpretive way," according to Bruner; "all that one can hope for is to interpret a reader's interpretation in as detailed and rich a way as psychologically possible" (35). Bruner asserts that "as our readers read, . . . they begin to construct a virtual text of their own" (36). In doing so, Bruner believes that "the *great* writer's gift to a reader is to make him a *better* writer" (37). I noticed a recurring pattern in what Bruner, Mairs, Angelou and others were saying about the connection between reading and writing.

I realized that while Bruner was publishing his theories, practitioners in the field of teaching language arts were also recognizing the relationships between reading and writing. Mary Ellen Giacobbe, in her report, "A Writer Reads, a Reader Writes", focuses on the case study of Tommy, as a reader of his own work. Through Tommy's work, Giacobbe illustrates that "when a writer makes changes in his text, it is because he has *read* the text and realized that the intended meaning is not coming through to the audience" (171). Giacobbe concludes that "Tommy is a writer who reads his text and rewrites in order to make it more readable for others" (178). She does not mention Tommy's experience with story as an important factor in his ability to see how to order his text to make it more readable for an audience. As Bruner might have put it, Tommy "possess[ed] a stock of maps that *might* give hints, and besides [he] know[s] a lot about journeys and about mapmaking" (36). When Nancie Atwell produced her book In the



Middle, one chapter, "Learning to Write from Other Writers," does focus on these reading/writing connections. In case studies, which include the students' writing, Atwell shows us how students begin "to view literacy as both considering and trying what authors do" (227). In addition to describing her fledgling authors' methods of borrowing genres, themes and techniques, Atwell repeatedly states that "it is what captivates students as readers that inspires writing" (241).

After reviewing the above literature, which now had new significance for me, I began my search for more specific work done in the area of reading-writing relationships. I found that Robert J. Tierney and Margie Leys continue with their report, "What Is the Value of Connecting Reading and Writing?," the line of inquiry into language interconnections that Emig had encouraged. Rather than believing that "reading and writing are largely linear operations which follow from one to the other, . . . [Tierney and Leys] hold that writers use reading in a more integrated fashion" (28). In discussing reading's influence on writing, Tierney and Leys state, "You may speculate that the type and amount of reading material to which writers are exposed may influence their choice of topic, genre, writing style, and vocabulary, "but they dig in to the heart of the connection between reading and writing when they continue, "it may also affect their values about writing and heighten their understanding of the author's craft" (23).

One effect that Tierney and Leys note reading has on writing is that "students will begin using their reading as a rich resource for considering possible topics" (25). Tierney and Leys illustrate this by sharing the story of a student writer who begins to see herself as a good writer during the composing of a story which combines her reading of Judy Blume's "Blubber" with her own personal experiences of being rejected by her peers. It would appear that Tierney and Leys' writing subject was not merely picking a topic from her reading, but was experiencing a strong reader-response to Blume's story, and this

response influenced her writing. At this point I began to see a gap that might be filled with the ideas I had for my research.

To my delight I discovered that other research on teaching conducted at the same time encouraged opportunities for students to connect reading and writing. In Alternative Perspectives of Reading/Writing Connections, Sarah J. McCarthy and Taffy E. Raphael show how three perspectives, information processing, constructivism, and Piagetian/naturalism, can work together to connect processes of reading and writing. McCarthy and Raphael describe the difference, in phenomenological thought, between "objective reality" and this "life-world" (which is organized and experienced by the individual) (17). McCarthy and Raphael go on to explain:

Phenomenological theory suggests the self as subject who interprets the natural world and endows objects and persons with personal meaning. The individual self is the source of meaning, whereas the external world is reflected within and interpreted by the individual's consciousness (18).

Based on this theory and the three different perspectives, it is suggested that a students' languaging processes (the way in which they interact with the external world) will be enhanced by blending the processes of reading and writing.

My search brought me closer to explorations into reading/writing relationships being conducted in the field of literacy theory and research. Timothy Shanahan and Robert J. Tierney cite many of the analyses and summaries which have been conducted over the past decade in their report, "Reading-Writing Connections: The Relations Among Three Perspectives". The three perspectives referred to in the title are communications, collaboration, and shared knowledge-shared process --this last perspective being undergirded by reading theory, cognitive psychology and linguistics. Shanahan and Tierney list the reading/writing connections which have been identified,

citing the authors responsible for recognizing each correlation: vocabulary, syntax, narrative and expository text organization, spelling and word recognition ability, phonemic awareness, writing mechanics, appropriateness of voice in composition and reading achievement, motivation, development of background setting in narration and reading achievement, creativity in writing and reading comprehension, writing productivity or fluency, and a sense of genre (32). Shanahan and Tierney note that "these studies emphasize communication by treating the reading-writing relationship as a negotiation between readers and writers (37). I was intrigued to see that by 1990, according to Shanahan and Tierney, "current thinking about the nature of reader-author negotiations represents an amalgamation emanating from pragmatics, schema theoretic notions of reading and writing, reader response theory, and a resurgence of interest in social aspects of literacy" (37). These were some of the same theoretical combinations which had brought me to my study! After a thorough discussion of the relations among the many paradigms from which these studies come, Shanahan and Tierney describe the "expanding visions" of the literary research community, and confess "we have at times been guilty of a too-shallow consumerism, rather than recipients of a deeper understanding of literacy." They predict that "the recent coming together of reading and writing could be a harbinger of this vision for the final decade of the 20th century" (46).

The "amalgamations" of "reader-author negotiations" are evident in the reflections of teacher researchers who have shared their findings with the language arts teaching community in the past two years. Ellen M. Shull, in her report, Memoir Writing: Evoking the Authentic Voice, explains how she motivates her college freshman students to write by having them read books such as, Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez, The House on Mango Street, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings, The Woman Warrior, individual essay, and fiction that "felt like a real life" (3). Shull points

out that "in these wonderful books the student writers found topics for writing about their own lives. . . . As the books celebrated and mourned significant events in the writers' lives, the student writing began to do the same thing" (4).

I saw many similarities between Shull's use of memoir to evoke writing, and the "Personal Anthology" unit I mentioned having written about earlier. Though I hadn't met Ellen M. Shull, I began to feel as though I was part of a teaching community that shared the same concerns and goals I had for my students. I continued to experience this feeling of communal support when I purchased and read Linda Rief's recently published book, Seeking Diversity: Language Arts with Adolescents. Rief shows us how she set up a classroom in which students immerse themselves in writing and reading. She then describes her own use of written models to invite her students to try certain types of writing (although she is careful to point out that students still have the final say in what type of writing they produce). In chapter four, "Generations: Writing and Reading for Life", we get an example of some writing Rief shares with her students and some of the students' written work that results. Like Atwell, Rief provides instructions for running a class that allow the integration of reading and writing, and gives clear examples of its effective results (23-119).

Finally my search brought me to the publication Reading/Writing Connections: Learning from Research, which looks at research, processes, instructional issues and directions for future research in reading/writing. This book inspired me from its beginning. In the text's forward Jane Hansen applauds its authors' definitions of literacy by concluding:

When literacy becomes real, students' stories about school will change. They will speak with emotion about issues they care about, write about, work toward, and read about. Their stories will connect them to one another and to

distant people. . . . As we redefine literacy, our schools and classrooms will show students how to use literacy to reach beyond their classrooms, schools, and communities (9).

In their introduction "Reading/Writing Research: Then and Now," Judith W. Irwin and Mary Anne Doyle explain the book's purpose, noting that "researchers now take into account such influences as classroom environments, teaching methods, social contexts, teacher attitudes and philosophies and teacher/student interactions" (10). Irwin and Doyle further observe that the recent shift to viewing reading and writing as processes is evident in recent research. New approaches, such as ethnographic and case study, coupled with qualitative measuring techniques, allow for greater varieties of research and provide more knowledge about reading/writing connections. "New literacy" identified by terms like "whole language," "reader response," and "process writing," according to these editors, must be more clearly defined (12). Irwin and Doyle ask "Is literacy the ability to use reading and writing . . . to construct personal meaning? Is it the ability to use reading and writing to understand and transform the world in which one lives?" (12). I, like Hansen in the forward, would answer their questions with a resounding YES! The editors hope the collection of work in this book will inspire its readers to conduct meaningful and "innovative" research on reading/writing connections (11-13).

I was motivated to continue my quest by Jill Fitzgerald's chapter in Irwin and Doyle's book, "Reading and Writing Stories." Fitzgerald concedes that, even in the best definition of story she can offer, "what's lacking . . . is the 'feel' of stories" (96). After elaborating on aspects of story included in most denotative definitions, Fitzgerald continues with the notion that "the feel of stories is intimately linked with the reasons we have stories. . . . Stories are stories and not something else because they do something or

fill some need or because they represent ourselves and our lives in some important way" (96). Two reasons Fitzgerald suggests we have stories are to satisfy a need we have to experience and order emotions and feelings, and to reach out and bond with others by expressing these emotions (97). Although there are implications for teachers based upon the research that's been done, such as reading's positive effects on writing and vice-versa, I agree with Fitzgerald; not enough research "touches the heart or exquisiteness of stories" (104). To explain why this might be the case, Fitzgerald quotes Bruner as saying researchers "have studied not the process, but the product, the tales rather than the tellers" (105). Fitzgerald then explores the "kinds of questions [which] would get at the heart of storiness" (105). In conclusion, Fitzgerald admits that there are no models for studying narrative thought, but insists that this is the direction research must go if we are to fully understand the relationships between reading and writing stories.

My search was put into perspective in chapter twelve, "Ongoing Research and New Directions", where Robert J. Tierney reviews the history of "Intertextuality and Integration" as beginning in the 1970s when educators first became interested in the impact that reading and writing had on one another. It wasn't until the end of the 1980s, according to Tierney, that "a shift toward a more dynamic view of reading/writing interrelationships became the focus" (263). These dynamics seem best summed up as when "learners crisscross between published texts, their own writing, and the writing of peers, [in which] a kind of dialectic between ideas emerges" (264). Tierney also notes that "research in this area is [still] in its infancy", and "most of our pedagogy has been tied to research and practice with a single text and has assumed that students approach that text in a linear, content-driven fashion" (264-265). Tierney believes that ideas about reading/writing connections "should lead us to view literacy as dynamic and varied", and

he urges us "to move to think about reading and writing working together in terms of multiplicity and heterogeneity" (266).

All of the above mentioned work has moved me, influenced me, and inspired me. It was through the connections I made reading and writing about this subject that I came to this part of my journey. I knew it was a journey into, what was for me, the unknown, so I carried with me Maxine Hairston's charge; "We have to do the hard thing, examine the intangible process" (84), and I reminded myself of Jerome Bruner's concession: "All that one can hope for is to interpret a reader's interpretation in as detailed and rich a way as psychologically possible" (35). Thus I embarked upon my Masters' project: a quest to study the students in my classroom to search for the connections with stories that exist for them. I wanted to discover how their connections revealed themselves to show story's importance in their developing lives.

CHAPTER TWO  
CLASSROOM AND CURRICULUM

**Designing the Study**

I wanted to delve into the work done in my classroom by my students to look deeply into the questions which had developed for me as I read about and explored the issues of reader response, reading/writing connections, and the importance of story. How does the importance of story reveal itself through the reading/writing connections made by the students in my classroom? The works of Emig, Odell, Graves, Atwell, Krashen and Myers encouraged me to attempt classroom research of my own. I'd hoped it might serve the English teaching community to look closely at how we use narrative in our classrooms to enable students to make meaningful knowledge for themselves. This in turn should validate work we do in integrated English classes by describing meaningful connections students make with story through writing.

The 1992-1993 school year during which my research took place, I taught six ninth-grade English classes. One was called English in the Workplace and those students were not included in my study as the curriculum is quite different from the one I describe here. The remaining five classes were "traditional" English with one of those five considered an Accelerated class. The four "regular" classes were heterogeneously filled with students from the low end, mainstreamed from special education classes, to students that would be considered above average and everything in between. This allowed the entire student population to be represented, with the exception of the high end students which were placed in the accelerated classes. Therefore, I wished to include the



accelerated class in this study. This presented no problem since that class followed the same curriculum, with work assigned to them in addition to that of the regular classes.

The suggested curriculum for the freshmen English classes I teach lends itself nicely to my study as the overriding theme is "self." The curriculum's integrated approach is designed to encourage students to make connections between literature and writing. It is therefore fitting that students use connections between the literature they read, and the writing they produce, to make personal discoveries about themselves.

### **Research Methods**

Teacher research is defined by Cochrane-Smith and Lytle as "systematic, intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work" (24). Provided with models of teacher research by Goswami and Stillman, and Daiker and Morenberg, I set out to design my study. I used methods gleaned from the works of Mohr and MacLean, and Cochrane-Smith and Lytle, to search for answers to my questions about how students connect with stories through their writing. My study involves the notion of story, rather than a specific linguistic question for example. Any teaching year is filled with considerable variables, and adolescent students as subjects provide even more variables. Because of the nature of my study and these variables, I felt it would be most appropriate to employ the qualitative research methods I'd learned from the models named above.

With all due respect to my research subjects rights, I first went through the process of obtaining permission to conduct research in my classroom. At the beginning of the school year, I proposed my study to the school district's research committee. My proposal was approved by the head of the district's research committee and the language arts supervisor (see appendix). I was then granted permission to proceed by the principal

of the school. During this first quarter, I informed all of the students in all five classes that I would be conducting this research study during the year. Later, after determining the twenty cases my study would focus on, I obtained written permission from those twenty students and their parents by sending home a letter and permission slip which the subjects returned signed by both themselves and a parent (see appendix). School district policy required that I protect the anonymity of the district, the school and the students, so, although I had obtained permission to quote from the students' writing, I've used pseudonyms to disguise the writers' true identities.

As I mentioned earlier, my district's freshman English curriculum lent itself nicely to this study. The integration of reading and writing encouraged my study of connections between the two. The flexibility of the curriculum allowed me to choose from a variety of literature, and to permit self-selected writing assignments. I was also able to determine during which quarter I would teach which units. This enabled me to put the focus of my study into second and third quarters, allowing me first quarter to get the study approved and started, and third quarter to make sure I had collected all the necessary data. First quarter I then collected initial surveys from all of the students, and conferenced and interviewed with them all to decide upon which twenty students I would concentrate.

During second and third quarters, I collected data from students in each of my five classes which provided me with a total of twenty students for my study. Throughout this period I regularly noted my observations as they related to my research topic in a log. On cover sheets I developed, students were questioned about their reading and writing processes during their work on self-selected writing assignments (see appendix). These cover sheets asked them how they came up with ideas for each particular paper and the students recorded their answers to these questions on this sheet which they turned in with their papers. I audio-taped my individual conferences with students in which I asked

them to elaborate on some of these responses. During these conferences I tried to delve more deeply into any connection issues I'd observed. I also audio-taped group work among students which might reveal connections students were making in the course of these group writing activities.

While teaching poetry and drama units fourth quarter, I spent time after classes copying the contents of twenty students' writing folders, which included the completed cover sheets that accompanied each assignment. I copied their writing folders because the contents were very valuable to the writers and I wanted to present the folders to them at the end of the year. I borrowed each of the twenty students' journals, with the promise of returning them by mail in manila envelopes I had them self-address. I wanted the students' journals as a possible source for tracking where their writing ideas originated.

My initial analysis of the data involved a complete reading of the contents of all twenty folders and their accompanying journals. This first analysis resulted in the cursory categorizing of the types of connections I observed. I'd attempted to select these twenty cases evenly across the five classes to represent a cross-section of the student population based on heterogeneity of gender and ability level. I did, however, select students whose folders were complete, so I would have sufficient data. Therefore my data represents the population of students responsible enough to turn in most or all of their work. These twenty cases seemed to show interesting connections early on that would be of interest to my study. I needed to narrow my selection fairly early, as I discovered it would be unreasonable to continue to try to conduct individual interviews with my entire student population. Of the twenty cases I'd selected, four of the students were in the accelerated English class.

From these twenty cases, I ultimately selected four students for complete case study development. I chose the four students I settled on after looking at all twenty cases

and seeing that these four were both representative in some way of the types of connections I was seeing, and at the same time demonstrated the differences I observed. My four case studies are intended to provide diverse examples in the students' ability levels, genders and ways of connecting with stories. Of the four case studies, one student is from the accelerated class. After conducting the case studies in which I closely examined the work of a particular student throughout second and third quarters, I went back to the data on all twenty students and reexamined it closely for cross-case analysis.

My research tries to discern the influence of stories on my students. The stories I am aware of, however, occur in the classroom, both in the form of commonly read literary pieces and individual reading selections, and in the form of prewriting exercises in which students share stories with one another, during informal sharing of journal entries, revision groups in which students are exposed to one another's writing, modeling by the teacher as I read my own works in progress to the class, and publication of student written work that the whole class gets an opportunity to read and/or hear. In my observation log I try to note when stories are being told in the class, especially where I see an interesting connection between that story and another one in the form of influence on another student's work.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Of course, it would be unrealistic to think that the only stories ninth-grade students encounter are those from the curriculum's literary offerings. Although students' responses to those stories are easiest to track in class, students are at least as influenced by stories they are exposed to in other classes, in the halls, at home, at the movies, or any variety of other places too numerous to name.

This is only one limitation of the study I conducted. If I could do this project differently, I would wish for the time to analyze the data as it comes in, rather than having to wait for the opportunity to examine it later, when the students are gone for summer vacation and then on to a new year in a different school. It would also have been very beneficial to be able to analyze and reflect upon the data during the research process, so I could have identified additional questions to ask students, or I could have clarified information the subjects had provided me with. While analyzing the data I thought of more questions I would like to have asked the students about their responses on cover sheets or recorded comments during interviews. One question in particular I have is about their out of class reading. Since I don't recognize many of the titles, it would have been beneficial for me to find out what those stories were about so I could see whether or not there were connections between a student's writing and that out of class reading.

Teaching full-time while conducting this research project required me to maintain a manageable number of cases to study. If I had the luxury of working exclusively on such a project, I would like to have collected data from a larger number of students. Ironically, it is because I was teaching that I was able to design the study and establish the research environment just as I wanted it. Perhaps a research "team" of at least two could work on such a project together throughout the year by designing the study together and combining their efforts to teach the students, collect and analyze data, and reflect upon and write about the results. Mainly I felt a twinge of grief over the summer, when I finally had some time to carefully examine the work of just a few selected students, that my school year teaching schedule does not allow me the reflective time to look as closely at each of my students work so as to more fully appreciate what excellent developing writers they all are. Although I don't have that time, conducting this project has made me more aware that each of my students connects with stories in his or her own unique way,

and that connection authorizes them to tell their own story . . . and they all have a story to tell. It is my job to help establish a climate in which this reading\writing relationship can exist and to empower my students with the freedom to become authors able to give voice to their stories.

### **Environment of the Study**

I will begin by describing my classroom, and take a closer look at the curriculum - including units, assignments, lesson plans and activities. I worked at creating a classroom climate in which students trusted enough to take the risk to share openly with one another. At the beginning of the year, I allocated time intended for us to get know one another through interviews, name games and sharing. I placed a great deal of importance on treating one another with respect, and ground rules were established to ensure that no one felt put down when willing to risk sharing with the class.

During this bonding period, time was also spent experimenting with all the different ways we could use our journals. I explained and modeled freewriting and ideas for journal use were presented from Active Voices and Inside Out. Students were invited to try each of the ideas to see what worked for them. Ultimately, the students' journals became their own to use as they liked, as long as they did write in them on a daily basis. Students came to count on their journal writing time, and during busy crunch periods, they let me know if I neglected to allow them their freewriting time! Volunteers were allowed to share their journal entries if they wished. This gave the class an opportunity to see what other students were doing with their journals and furthered our attempt to know one another and respect diverse voices. The wide variety of entries that students shared were enjoyed and appreciated.

Once the use of journals had been established, I provided a suggested entry topic each day -- a place to get started if a student didn't have something in particular to write about on any given day. These suggestions, posted on the board, were quotes to respond to, questions to ponder, or themes to explore. I tried to make the journal prompt relevant to the day's lesson, often the literature we were studying, and referred to it as an anticipatory set to establish a transition from freewriting time to the lesson plan. That was when the students' journal sharing took place with partners or the whole class. Creativity, experimentation, and/or self-disclosure were respected and celebrated. Each day's lesson was determined by the particular unit we were on.

### First Quarter

For my classroom research, I collected data during second and third quarters, but I began practicing my research methods during first quarter, finding some useful information even then. First quarter involved establishing the classroom climate and doing a lot of journal writing, as I described above. We also brainstormed the variety of ways writing can be used, generating a class chart which listed our ideas. This chart remained at the back of the room throughout the year as a resource for writing ideas. Students wrote their first self-selected paper, the fall writing sample, during this quarter.

Many students were surprised, and all were highly motivated by the fact that they were able to choose both the type of writing and the topic for their writing. I was delighted to have 100% of the papers in all classes turned in on time. This initial enthusiasm for writing generated a momentum which continued throughout the year. For every writing assignment, students were allowed class time to prewrite and come up with ideas for their papers, which often involved discussion with partners and/or groups. Ample time to get started with a rough-draft was also provided in class, and students who

brought work in progress to class were allowed to share with classmates to get feedback, revision suggestions, and help with editing if they desired.

First quarter literature focused on short stories from our classroom text, Prentice Hall Literature: Gold, or copies of stories I provided for them. The students read "The Most Dangerous Game" by Richard Connell, "Harrison Bergeron" by Kurt Vonnegut Jr., "All the Years of Her Life" by Morley Callaghan, "Beware of the Dog" by Roald Dahl, "If I Forget Thee Oh Earth" by Arthur C. Clarke, "The Red-headed League" by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and "The Scarlet Ibis" by James Hurst. The first six stories were ideal for reviewing the elements of short story, but reader response became the more overtly taught lesson with "The Scarlet Ibis".

James Hurst's story touches nearly every student with its honest portrayal of the narrator's love/hate relationship with his developmentally and physically disabled younger brother, Doodle. Students were given "post it" notes, which they attached right to the book's pages, and were instructed to make a brief note to themselves any time the text recalled for them something from their own background of experience. Students from class period to class period used a common text, so they enjoyed seeing the responses left by the students before them, and sometimes ended up responding to a previous response!

Students connected personally to parts of the text ranging from the characters' sibling relationship to special places like, "Old-Woman Swamp," in the story's setting. Students related to the main character's acts of cruelty toward his brother, either because they'd been the perpetrators or recipients of such cruelty. Students responded strongly to the protagonist's loss of a loved one. They did not hesitate to tell the class about their own little sister who, like Doodle, had died only a year ago due to illness, their grandfather who bled profusely from the mouth when he died, just like Doodle, or the guilt they felt knowing their father died alone, like Doodle, in an airport with no loved



ones near. "The Scarlet Ibis" offered the framework upon which the students could hang their own stories and share the profound experiences they needed to tell. A community of storytellers developed in which reading and writing became meaningful experiences.

## Second Quarter

The use of reader response continued as we moved from short stories to novels by reading two Native American short stories, "Lost Sister" and "As It Was In the Beginning", before beginning the novel When the Legends Die. We continued to identify the same elements that were used in short stories in the novel, but we also began to explore the patterns which, according to Joseph Campbell, recur in stories, and tried to identify these patterns in Hal Borland's novel about a Native American boy raised by his mother the old way, and then forced to adapt to reservation life. I overtly taught the heroic quest as a model, and displayed a chart which illustrated the hero's departure, the trials, the threshold, the symbolic death and rebirth, and the return. The class engaged in lively discussions as we debated which parts of the quest Tom Blackbull might be undergoing, or whether the story follows this pattern at all. Journal prompts during this unit elicited responses about their ideas of what a hero is, who their heroes are, whether heroes are important and why, and how to be your own hero. We also responded to quotes taken directly from the novel, and did guided dictations from the novel and copy-changed some of those passages. The students were immersed in the story's themes, patterns and style.

We constantly worked back and forth, discussing the novel's importance to them personally, the relevance it had to the world in which they lived and what it taught them as writers about writing. Students began to recognize the quest as one in which we all engage every day. They know better than anyone the trials of peer pressure, drugs, AIDS, developing sexuality, relationships, conflicts with parents, teachers and bosses, the pressure to excel, and survival. Adolescents undergo symbolic death and rebirth in the leaving behind of childhood and the initiation into young adulthood. The ethical dilemmas they face almost constantly and the moral decisions they make could be truly

heroic. Or, perhaps, using the pattern of story, they will begin to see their choices this way and come to more noble resolutions.

Students were given time to complete another writing assignment, again on a self-selected topic. I suggested that anyone having trouble thinking of what to write about might try using the heroic quest model as a pattern to write a fictional story about a hero, or a personal story about their own lives as they undergo all or part of a quest. I joined them, writing my own true life quest to overcome teenage single-motherhood, lack of education, poverty and welfare to complete my college degree and become their teacher. When this assignment was finished and ready to turn in, I asked the students to complete a cover sheet which questioned them about their experiences with writing the paper, and any influences on the paper they were aware of.

Students continued to freewrite in their journals, but they were also asked to use them to record personal responses as we read To Kill A Mockingbird second quarter. Reader response to this story became the almost exclusive focus as we read Harper Lee's novel together. In spite of the fact that this story takes place nearly sixty years ago, and in the South, students responded personally to the sibling relationship between Jem and Scout, the single-parent family in which they were being raised, and the myriad characters which reminded them of relatives and neighbors of their own. Students also equated with the race, class and gender stereotypes the novel's characters fall victim to.

We attempted to bring the story to life by enacting the courtroom drama scene, looking at the history of Blacks in America, and examining how racism continues in our world today. Students used symbols to artistically represent a favorite character from the novel by drawing a character map, and then dug deeper into the novel by including quotes from the text which supported their use of symbol.

After finishing the novel, students were assigned another paper on a self-selected topic to be turned in with another completed cover sheet questioning them about any connections their paper may have had to the responses they had to this novel, or any other story.

### Third Quarter

Third quarter began the Personal Anthology unit, which reconciled the district's requirement to teach autobiography, biography and research skills during the same quarter. Self-selected writing was suspended during this unit when the students were asked to write papers which fell within this unit's genres. Although they were asked to write both biographies and autobiographies they exercised freedom in choosing the subjects they wrote about.

Students learned library research skills as they collected sources about the biographical subject of their choice. Notes and a log of their work were kept in their journals. To keep the focus "self," students were asked to choose someone they admired or they felt had influenced them in some way. For the sake of making research possible, this person needed to be famous enough to have been written about in encyclopedias, books, magazine or newspaper articles. Students wrote a biography of their subject including documentation and a bibliography of their sources. Students were then asked to write another more personal biography based on an interview they conducted with someone they were interested in learning more about. Those interviews were with a friend, family member, community member, professional, etc. Models of interview papers were read from Active Voices (Moffett 82-86), Studs Terkle's Working, and Boise Weekly (a local downtown magazine with a section called "20 Questions.") This year, a video-taped interview by Oprah Winfrey with Michael Jackson illustrated an interview in

progress. Interview questions, and notes recorded during the interviews were kept in the students' journals. The interviews were written up as they chose: question-answer, essay, first or third-person narrative, and turned in as biography number two.

Students then viewed the video-taped film, My Father's Glory, and were asked to watch episodes of The Wonder Years at home to begin our look at autobiographical writing. We read autobiography, personal narrative and memoir in Active Voices (Moffett 31-77), and from Prentice-Hall Literature: Gold, "Dance to the Piper" (De Mille 455-464) and "Kon Tiki" (Heyerdahl 465-474). I read aloud excerpts from Kurt Vonnegut's autobiography, Fates Worse Than Death; Annie Dillard's memoirs, An American Girlhood; and Tobias Wolff's personal narrative, This Boy's Life, and students read several excerpts from Maya Angelou's autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings. During this second half of the Personal Anthology unit on autobiography, students used their journals as a place to collect memories from their own lives that were "triggered" by the pieces they'd read, or by a variety of prewriting exercises which served as this unit's journal prompts.

"Snapshot" memories were triggered by pictures that students brought to class and freewrote about. Students brainstormed a list of "firsts," and freewrote about the more memorable of them. After a "show and tell," during which ninth-graders brought cherished possessions from home to share with the class, students freewrote about "objects" which had been meaningful to their lives. Stories covered their bodies in the form of scars that had been left there from accidents, and many "scar stories" were recollected in journals after listening to descriptions of bike wrecks, surgeries and even the emotional scars of moves away from friends, divorce, etc.. Students drew maps of neighborhoods they'd lived in and identified the memories which exist in the "spaces and places" they illustrated.

At this point, students were asked to write their own autobiographical pieces, personal narratives or memoirs. They used their journal entries as rich resources of material from which to choose, or they started from scratch if they liked. During this unit, students heard many of each others' stories in small-group and class discussions. Throughout the unit, I modeled by sharing with the students stories of my own. Many of the students' stories were triggered by others' stories, and many of those were used as well. The students' narrative pieces were then collected with their biographies to create their Personal Anthologies. A cover was designed by drawing a character map, like the one created during the To Kill A Mockingbird unit, only this time the subjects they depicted were themselves. Now that they were the authors, they quoted themselves to support the symbol they had chosen. A cover sheet once again questioned the students about possible sources for the writing ideas represented in their anthology.

### **Purpose of the Study**

I believe that the work I did over the course of this year serves the teaching community in a variety of ways. Colleagues saw what I was doing, and we discussed my work. I not only shared with them my findings, but the methods I used to search for them as well. This evolved into grassroots classroom research communities as other teachers began to share their work with me, and were encouraged to implement research into their teaching roles. I have brought the perspective of my teacher research into the areas of staff development, curriculum and mentoring I am involved with. I hope my voice has also been added to that of other teacher researchers, strengthening the educational community, as I share my current and continued work in published writing, presentations at conferences, inservices and workshops.

These are the units during which the student writing was produced that I collected as data for my Master's project. In case studies, I have analyzed this data as it corresponded to responses students gave on writing assignment cover sheets, comments students made during audio-taped conferences and small-group discussions, the students' journal entries, and my own observations of the connections which were made between stories. I have interpreted this data to identify specific connections made between stories students were exposed to and the writing which resulted, looking specifically for how those connections reveal themselves. I have also generalized about any meaningful patterns I've observed which cross case studies.

## CHAPTER THREE

### STUDENTS' STORIES: FOUR CASE STUDIES OF STUDENT WRITING

#### "Andie"

Andie sat back in her chair, arms folded tightly across her chest. The rest of the class buzzed with sound as other students worked with their partners to come up with two adjectives to describe their unique characteristics. They'd already had the "I am" poem they were to write explained and modeled. Andie's silence caught my eye, so I left the group I was with to find out what was wrong. Andie was blank -- she said she could think of nothing to describe herself. I'd noticed her talking with a couple of the other girls in class at times, (I especially noticed at those times when I wanted them to be listening) and asked if they were her friends. When she replied that they were, I recruited them to help Andie come up with her adjectives. As the other two girls took over, I walked away to monitor the rest of the room. When I returned to Andie's desk, she was well into stanza two of her "I Am" poem, and I saw the first line, "I am a friendly girl who is fun to be around".

For her fall writing sample, Andie had written a letter to a friend from camp. This wry letter detailing the woes of camp life demonstrated how clever and humorous Andie could be while also showing the flair she had for descriptive language. Andie's letter describes the bad food, stormy weather and poor sanitation conditions which she must endure:

Well, that night, a huge storm came. . . . The next day was even worse. . . .

This horrible stench soon entered my nostrils. Inside was a bench with three



holes in it. . . . Like I'm really going to go with someone on the right and left of me. . . . P.S. Send me some food! I'm starving!

Andie's descriptive strengths continued to be illustrated when she wrote a copy-change of a passage from James Hurst's "The Scarlet Ibis", one of the short stories we had read.

It's strange that all this is still so clear to me, now that the summer has long since fled and time has had its way. A grindstone stands where the bleeding tree stood, just outside the kitchen door, and now if an oriole sings in the elm, its song seems to die up in the leaves, a silvery dust. The flower garden is prim, the house a gleaming white, and the pale fence across the yard stands straight and spruce. But sometimes (like right now), as I sit in the cool, green-draped parlor, the grindstone begins to turn, and time with all its changes is ground away-- and I remember Doodle (189).

Andie's personal responses to the story, described in her journal, detailed recent memories of the death of a family friend she'd felt very close to. Andie used these memories to replace Hurst's content while imitating his style.

I'm intrigued that all this is so clear to me, now that seven years have past and time has wandered by. The trampoline still stands where the memories were made, just outside the study window, and now if children play and have fun, their happiness is swallowed by my tears. The unusable cars in the driveway, the sidewalk cracking, and the irrigation dam rusting don't realize the loss. But now as I mourn in the shadow of the giant "pod tree" the trampoline begins to fray again and life with a great loss has to begin again-- and I remember [him].

When students were later given the freedom to self-select their own topic for writing assignment number two, Andie chose her friend's death as the topic for her paper.

The copy-change she'd turned in became the story's lead. Her paper then continued to be a touching tribute to a man who "although only a family friend . . . for three years was the only father I really had." Hurst's style of structuring sentences with embedded subordinate clauses, which Andie had imitated in the copy change, is evident in lines throughout this paper like: "Poor [woman], now a widow, left with tears running down her face." and; "The children, left without a dad, now to live the major events of their lives with the absence of their father." "The Scarlet Ibis" may have had an influence on both her choice of topic, death, and her writing style, descriptive subordinate clauses. More importantly, I observe that by reading "The Scarlet Ibis", Andie was given the framework and tools she needed in order to tell her very important story. This was a big risk for Andie, and her subjects stay much safer in the next couple of compositions.

Another copy-change, this time of a passage from Hal Borland's When the Legends Die (see appendix), described the fluorescent sterility of a newly-opened supermarket. At this time, in her journal, Andie described the frustration she felt over the amount of homework she'd been given. Not only did she have a test in Science, but I'd given another writing assignment as well. Andie took advantage of her license to choose the topic, and wrote about a natural phenomenon she would be tested on in science class. Andie's writing remained safe and cool in this next paper, "Glaciers". Andie cited science class as the source for her idea for this paper, but responded that she'd heard no stories which had influenced her paper.

During a conference, Andie realized that she had been reading a lot about glaciers in her textbook, though she wouldn't call that stories. I agreed. She noticed that her writing style in "Glaciers" was more formal, technical and less descriptive than in previous papers, which was perhaps influenced by the textbook writing. We discussed documenting sources in researched writing, which we would be studying in more depth

second semester. Although not all teachers would approve of me allowing a student to use another writing assignment for their class, I was pleased to see a resourceful student use writing as a way to solve the work load problem and integrate two curriculums. Although Andie was reading To Kill A Mockingbird and her journal was filled with personal responses, I saw no influence of it on this paper.

For her next writing assignment, Andie turned in a collection of poems. Andie was unable to respond when asked how she made the decision to write on this topic. According to Andie, the source of her poems were poetry she'd written before, and no other stories had influenced this collection. Andie did not have any rough-drafts or revisions of her work, and I suspected she had simply recycled some work she'd done earlier, perhaps the previous year. Her journal, meanwhile, was rich with responses to P.S. Kill A Mockingbird which remained undeveloped. Andie named The Diary of Anne Frank as a book she was reading on her own outside of class.

This influence became apparent when Andie chose Anne Frank as the subject of a biography she wrote for her Personal Anthology. Andie's bibliography for this paper also listed Anne Frank Remembered by Miep Gies, and a Seventeen article, "War and Remembrance: A New Entry from Anne Frank" by Jayne Hendel in June of 1989. Andie's strong identification with Anne Frank was apparent in her biography. Andie synthesized the information from the three sources well, and owned the material in a way that made her writing more natural than students' researched writing often is. Twice in the paper, Andie referred to Anne's dream. When describing Anne, Andie wrote "Anne Frank wanted to be a movie star. She had numerous entries in her diary about her dream." When concluding her biography, Andie made the accusation that "The Germans deprived Anne of her life. She definitely had a lot of things going for her in the future. She might have gone to Hollywood and fulfilled her dream . . ."

For the second biography in her personal anthology, Andie interviewed her little brother (I suspect the one she refers to when relating her sibling relationship to that of Jem and Scout when responding to To Kill A Mockingbird in her journal). Andie's interview notes clearly illustrated the question and answer method of the interview, yet her paper was written in third-person narrative using occasional direct quotes: an interview write-up style we'd analyzed in Active Voices. Andie said she really liked the chance to spend time talking with her little brother for this interview. She purposely converted her interview notes to narrative, as Andie said in a conference, because "I liked the way they were written up in that one book."

Although Andie saw the interviews from Active Voices as her only influence, I saw other possible connections. In addition to the influences of the interviews we read in class, I saw a direct connection between some journal entries written in response to To Kill A Mockingbird, and Andie's choice to interview her brother. Andie had commented in response to Jem and Scout's closeness, and remarked that, because of the age difference, she and her younger brothers were not close. A delightful paragraph in Andie's interview write up reminded me of the section in "The Scarlet Ibis" when Doodle described for his brother building a house at their cherished "Old Woman Swamp" where they will live as adults, Doodle married to their mother, and his brother married to Daddy (Hurst 193-194).

[He] also wants to get married when he is older and have twenty children. (Ten girls and ten boys.) This is how he wants his house to be: I want a huge house with a dog training place in the backyard. I will have a gorilla along with dogs, too. My house will have a living room and a kitchen. My house will be either gray or blue, my wife will decide. There will be a girl's bathroom and a

boy's bathroom. I will also have someone to clean my house so I won't have to do it.

About the final paper in her personal anthology, an autobiography, Andie wrote, "I don't think what I read influenced my autobiography." She held to this view during our conference almost as if acknowledging an influence would detract from her ownership of this paper, of which she was understandably very proud. I, on the other hand, saw a combination of connections. Andie's journal responses had been strong concerning Scout's confrontation with adult hypocrisy while reading To Kill A Mockingbird. Her admiration for Anne Frank was clearly demonstrated in her biography, and she cited Maya Angelou as the other author she was reading at the time. Andie's autobiographical piece was triggered, according to her, by a photograph she brought to class to share. The picture showed her "in a gymnastics meet doing a tuck jump on the beam." Andie commented that the opportunity to share her memory with her group, and to hear their stories triggered by photos they'd brought to share, helped her remember a lot more, and gave her additional ideas for her autobiography.

Andie's autobiography was a culmination of her writing ability and her willingness to take risks. She shared the betrayal she experienced as an enthusiastic gymnastics student whose encounters with coaches turned out to be negative. The first paragraph states:

When I was little, I was involved in gymnastics. Ever since I can remember I have always wanted to be a star and win first place in the Olympics. Until the summer before I was in second grade, my dreams were every child's dream. My family could not afford the gymnastics classes that I wanted to be in and I had to settle with doing head stands on our living room floor.

Andie was "thrilled that [her] dreams might come true of being a big Superstar" when her mom enrolled her in a summer session of gymnastics.

Andie had a successful first class with a coach who seemed to enjoy her. She was realistic about her new ability, but wanted to continue to work. When she did continue, Andie's next coaches went to jail for sexually abusing one of her teammates. After that, Andie was without a coach for awhile. She was afraid of being hurt like her friend had been if she went back, but she realized she couldn't be an "Olympian hero" if she didn't return.

Another coach was rebuilding her trust, but that coach had a supervisor who criticized and insulted Andie until "she had hurt her self image and self esteem so bad" that Andie became depressed and quit gymnastics. Although, the difference is that Andie quit gymnastics, I saw the possible influence of Agnes De Mille's "Dance to the Piper", which describes De Mille's struggle to achieve her dream to become a dancer, in Andie's narrative. "Dance to the Piper" was one of the models of autobiography we'd read in class. Andie did not mention it on her cover sheet as an influence. In fact, as I mentioned about her previous paper, Andie seemed not to want to recognize any outside influences on her stories; Yet, when Andie concluded in this paper "I used to cry because my dreams were over but now I understand that life is not fair and you don't get to do everything that you want to do", I hear a child's voice as insightful as Scout Finch's. I understand why Anne Frank's dreams were so important to Andie, and why she felt such outrage at those dreams being taken away. Most of all, I hope Maya Angelou's ability to overcome adversity will hearten Andie.

When Andie reflected on the experience of writing this paper, she wrote "It was fun to learn more than the 3 Rs of school and learn about personal stories and maybe even learn lessons from them." The lessons Andie learned from the experience of story

seemed to move her from a reluctant student with a low self-esteem, unable to come up with positive descriptors for herself without a little help from friends, to a perceptive young woman who learned to use her connections with stories she'd read quite competently to express her own stories through writing.

Andie quite obviously was using writing as a means of discovery. Murray's theories about writing to learn are supported by Andie when she commented that after writing one paper, she knew more about glaciers for the science test. Murray's assertion that writers discover what they have to say as part of the writing process is exemplified throughout Andie's freshman year as a writer. Andie began to discover who she was, at least when mirrored by her friends, and she discovered some of what she knows about glaciers, little brothers, gymnastics and dreams. Atwell might point out that Andie was so captivated as the reader of The Diary of Anne Frank that she'd been inspired to write, as Bruner would put it, the virtual text of her own experience with being cheated out of her dream. Andie learned as a writer in the same way Giacobbe described her students learning, from the text as readers of their own writing. This was evidenced in her imitation of James Hurst's writing style in sentence structure and descriptive clauses. Beyond that, I saw Andie doing what Shull describes her students as doing, when she used others' stories as models through which she mourned and celebrated aspects of her own life.

### "Justin"

Justin loved to read and to write. He told me so in the survey he took at the very beginning of class. Justin liked to write stories most. The best story he'd read was The White Dragon, and his favorite author was Anne McCaffrey. Most recently he had read Star Wars: Heir to the Empire. Justin said he liked to read for pleasure outside of class requirements before bed at night. I happen to know that's not the only time he liked to read. One of Justin's early journal entries began "She just made me put my book down right when it was getting interesting." The "she" guilty of this abomination is, of course, me asking Justin to stop reading when he was supposed to be writing in his journal. Many of Justin's entries contained phrases like: "I'd rather be reading," or "I want to read." Some of Justin's entries even made observations about another avid reader in the class, and whether or not he was reading when he was supposed to be writing, or if I was doing anything about it! One such example contained the following, "Now he's writing . . . no way . . . I say next time I look over there he'll be reading again."

Justin's enthusiastic consumption of reading material taught him far more than I ever could long before he came to my English class. He devoured science fiction, newspapers, comics and fantasy. It was impossible for me to trace what influences led to his fall writing sample. Justin chose for his topic a vacation to California, and he decided to write about it in the form of a short story. I expected a story about a boy who spends a couple of weeks over summer vacation in California with his family visiting Disneyland and Magic Mountain: a variation on a theme I was trying to avoid -- "What I did over summer vacation." What I got was the first-person narrative of a character named Frank,



who thought he was taking a vacation to Disneyland, but instead just got taken. First on the plane, Frank explains, "My seat is the middle one on the side and I ended up sitting next to two guys who like to gamble. Well they let me join in but never told me I was supposed [to] get twenty one," and later in the rental car Frank complains; "At the first stop light I came to a man hops in my car grabs my purse and leaves. Lucky for me my wallet was in my pocket." The understated humor of the piece made up for its rough mechanics. I later discovered that Justin was usually meticulous with his papers, but needed much more time with the process, often involving several drafts.

After learning that he would be able to self-select the topics for all of this semester's writing assignments, Justin began his writing process in his journal. He could begin prewriting early since he could also choose what he wrote about during freewriting time in his journal each day. A paper due October 20th had its inception in journal entries beginning September 14th. Each day's journal entries added installments to continue the adventures of our unlucky character, Frank Clinton. For writing assignment number two, Justin turned in both the rough-draft and final copy of a computer revised, edited and printed story, "More Frank Clinton Adventures." Although the seeds of ideas for this story were in Justin's journal, it was far from a simple recopy of what he'd written each day. The final copy of his story showed Justin's work on development and revision of the plot. For instance, the journal entry version read: "Flying the plane was lots of fun for I got to see Canada but then the terrorist dude came back and told me to get some sleep and then yelled at me for going the wrong way." Translated to the final copy, this passage read:

Flying the plane was lots of fun. Once the terrorist dude left I decided to head north to see Canada. I thought it was about time I saw a foreign country, I was interested what the difference was, and what it looked like from the air. Upon

arriving in Canada I found it to look pretty cool from 10,000 feet in the air.

Once I got a brief glimpse of Canada the terrorist dude came back and told me to get some sleep but then he kept yelling at me, keeping me awake, for going the wrong way. I finally got to go to sleep.

Revision from journal freewrites to the final version of this paper also involved adding events never written about before, and leaving out many things from the journal which no longer seemed relevant.

Both stories, the fall writing sample and writing assignment number two, began with the first-person narrator, Frank Clinton, directly addressing the reader: "Hello there my name is Frank um.... Oh yeah it's Frank Clinton;" and, "Hello my name is Frank Clinton and I have some more stories to tell you." The second story briefly reviewed the first story to bring the reader up to date. Perhaps it was because he was a reader that Justin maintained such an awareness of his audience. I'm not sure if Justin had had this type of direct dialogue with the reader modeled. He did mention in a conference that his love for reading adventure began when he was very young and he'd read novels from the "Choose Your Own Adventure" series, which, I believe, address the reader throughout the stories.

I was also interested in the humor Justin interjected into his stories. The influences for this humor did not come from the reading that he identified he was doing that I'm aware of, except for the comics Justin mentioned in the early survey. I rather think that cultural influences, like "Naked Gun" and "Saturday Night Live" are responsible for the ironic undertones present in Justin's writing. The tone Frank Clinton used sometimes sounded very much like a character on Saturday Night Live called "the liar."

While writing "More Frank Clinton Adventures," Justin named Scions of Shannara by Terry Brooks as the reading he was been doing out of class. Later Justin's journal entries switched from Frank Clinton to dungeon and dragon type descriptions which may have been influenced by the Brooks story, but since these entries didn't result in a paper, I never asked about them.

While reading When the Legends Die the class wrote a copy-change of one of Hal Borland's passages:

So Tom entered the world of small-time rodeo, a world of hot, dusty little cow-country towns, makeshift arenas, vicious, unpredictable horses, ambitious country riders and jealous third-rate professionals. And, with Red Dillon, a world of noisy saloons, smoky pool halls, ratty little hotels, fly-specked chili parlors, conniving bettors (107).

In this passage the main character of the story, an Indian boy, meets up with a rodeo man, and is introduced to the world of small-time rodeo. In his journal, Justin wrote about being initiated into the world of rock concerts, yet the copy-change he actually turned in, once again, involved Frank Clinton:

So Frank Clinton arrived at the big time cities. A world of crooked terrorists, rich snobby adults, low security banks, vicious, money hungry mobs, serial killers, and unaware airplane pilots, and with Greg Gore, a world of free planes, smokey lounges, low air fares, free cocktails, and the perfect place to be a terrorist.

Until the introduction of Greg Gore in this copy change, I had not connected the character Frank's last name with the, then, presidential candidate Bill Clinton. It was funny, because after realizing that these characters got their names from Bill and Al, I noticed that Justin had very unfavorable things to say about them in his journal. On

election day Justin wrote, "I hope Bush wins or else Perot -- preferably Bush." The next day his journal expressed his disappointment in the election results, "Clinton won . . . ugh."

Although Justin's copy-change did not reappear in any later writing, his newfound character, Greg Gore, did. In his next sequel to the previous Frank Clinton stories, "Frank Goes Home, Not", Frank is introduced to the man he later refers to as "his best and only friend, Greg Gore." This particular adventure took place on a plane. Justin mentioned that a movie, he can't remember which one, might have influenced his story. The humorous dialogue and sight gags reminded me of "Airplane", and the crash scene could be a parody of the recently released movie "Alive." The story's title and use of current slang could easily have come from the popular teen classics "Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure" or "Wayne's World."

Justin put his all into this ten-page story, writing three drafts in addition to the original journal work. The development of a high jacking-plot, the introduction of more characters, and the constant comedy in this piece are impressive. It was the best writing I'd seen from Justin so far. Although the tone is light, this paper seems to follow more of a pattern, perhaps influenced by our study of the heroic quest model, than Justin's previous stories. Of course, the type of reading/writing Justin does, fantasy/sci-fi, would already follow that pattern perhaps providing an even earlier influence. Without reprinting all ten pages of Justin's story, it is hard to do it justice, but perhaps one page will convey the flavor of the piece:

"That's all folks," the pilot said over the intercom in a Porky Pig voice. We climbed out of our seats and went down the ramp way to a man with an uzi and a cowboy hat. "Well, Dan Dukakis pretty good job except for that big hole in the wing and hull." "It was his fault sir," he said and then pointed at me, "He

was the one who skipped the plane across the Atlantic and ran into the African Coast." "Well, how was I to know the coast was there. I thought it was a big lake. Besides, what was I doing flying the plane?" I retorted. "Yeah, what was he doing flying the plane?" the unknown cowboy asked. "I, I, I thought he was a new employee," Dan answered. Pulling Dan over the cowboy dude said, "Why would I hire a guy with his fly undone and the IQ of a walnut, who skips a 747 over the ocean? Wait a minute. The IQ of a walnut, survived skipping a 747 over the ocean and crashing into the African Coast. He could have potential." "See, I told you," Dan answered indignantly. "Shut up and bring him to my office." the cowboy ordered.

On the cover sheet, after writing this piece, Justin admits it's "getting harder to make funny."

Justin's difficulty with creating more humorous action adventure for Frank Clinton seemed evident in the final installment, "Frank Clinton Tale." It was a much shorter story that seemed to have run out of steam. Justin was now reading DragonLance: Tales II, Volume 1, Reign of Istar. It may be that these multi-volume fantasy books were responsible for Justin's desire to write on-going sequels. According to Justin, he got the idea for this last story because "Frank needed a promotion from the last story." Now there's commitment to your characters!

In this last piece, it is five years later, and Frank Clinton has been promoted to captain of a new base in Cuba. Frank has come a long way from his vacation to California! Although this story was shorter, two and one-half typed pages instead of ten, it was still filled with detail. These details were about fighter planes. I have no idea how accurate Justin's information was, but he seemed to know a lot about planes. No other stories he'd read during the semester were about planes except one Roald Dahl short story

we read during first quarter, "Beware of the Dog". Justin's attention to detail, however, could be attributed to the science fiction and fantasy he read.

This regard for detail served Justin well in his next assignment to write a biography for his Personal Anthology. For his subject, Justin picked Aristotle. By now, Justin was on his sixth DragonLance book, and he believed that this reading was affecting his writing style by making it "less opinion and more fact." Justin's journal entries for the remainder of fourth quarter dealt almost exclusively with dungeons and dragons. They were elaborate indexes of points received, and the type of god level to be attained. Even in this very academic research paper, Justin began by addressing the reader as he had in his comic/adventures, "I say Aristotle. . . you say who was Aristotle?" The paper went on to explain the life of this philosopher and revealed Justin's admiration for his intellect and achievement. Several diagrams of Aristotle's hypotheses followed in an appendix which reminded me of the diagrams Justin had drawn in his journal to map his fantasy games.

When Justin was allowed to choose, he interviewed his mother as the subject of the next paper in his Personal Anthology. The paper was written in essay form and was kind of a listing of information about Justin's mother. In a paragraph which recalled his appreciation for humor, Justin shared a funny story his mother related to him during the interview.

There was an old man lived down the street in a tiny house with an outhouse. He liked children and would give them candy when they came to visit. One day her cousin came to visit and they ran down to visit Charlie to get candy and so she could show her cousin what an outhouse looked like. Before going to the house, they ran over to the outhouse and my mom pulled open the door to show her cousin the inside . . . and there was Charlie! They were so

embarrassed they ran home and my mom didn't go back to visit Charlie for several weeks.

It may have been the influence of these stories told at home which enabled Justin to look at the humorous side of life. Stories told in class about scars and accidents helped Justin to recall the details of his autobiographical memoir. The story of a dangerous fall at a local ski area could have been serious and frightening. Instead, Justin told the story with the same understated irony he used when writing about Clinton and Gore. Justin described being distracted while downhill skiing by a couple of guys talking, and goes on to write, "When I looked back in front of me I unfortunately had the miss fortune of heading strait for a tree at twenty miles per hour. . . So I just ran into the tree. Well, it really wasn't running into the tree but more of bouncing off the tree." Justin made the most of the irony of the situation when he explained that the knee which was causing him great pain got soaked, examined, x-rayed and treated with special care, and in the end it was his thumb that was broken. Justin concluded his memoir, "I ended up with a cast on my thumb. The cast did not stop me from skiing. We went out and bought a big huge mitten for me to wear over my cast. I looked weird, but I didn't mind I was skiing."

Justin's case is a good example of one in which the influences extend outside the classroom. This made it more difficult to track, but I still have no doubt that the prolific reading Justin did and his supportive family, contributed to his sense of detail, his sense of humor and his sense of story. Frank Clinton may be the major character in a box office hit one day.

Justin's ability to revise so extensively perhaps came from his ability as a reader. He seems to have done what Giacobbe describes as transferring this ability to read his own work. It could be concluded that Justin rereads his own text and then revises it to make it more readable for others. Furthermore, Justin's reading/writing processes

appeared to present a complex negotiation of the kind Tierney and Leys describe. There seem to be influences on his choice of topic, genre, writing style and vocabulary. It also appears that Justin exhibits a deep understanding of and appreciation for writing as a craft. Connections between what Justin read and what Justin wrote were not easily observed, in part because Justin was such an avid reader, making the relationship more complex. Influences on Justin's writing style were illustrated, but it is when getting to the heart of his stories in personal memoirs that I sensed the "feel", as Fitzgerald puts it, of the storytelling bond which seemed to exist in his family life, and in his writing.



## "Don"

His coach described him as "a man among boys", and it would be easy to confuse Don for a man as his tall, broad athletic frame filled the desk he sat at in my classroom. Blond hair and blue eyed, he was the all-American boy. Hunting and sports were his favorite hobbies, and Don was his freshman class' hero on the football field and the basketball court.

In addition to his athletic achievements, Don met the academic criteria to be placed in the accelerated section of ninth grade English that I taught. All of this success created quite an image to uphold, and Don didn't express too much in class discussions or individual conferences, but his writing revealed the developmentally appropriate questions and confusion of any adolescent.

Don did not view himself as a writer, or much of a reader, according to the survey he responded to at the beginning of the year. He claimed to write only when he had to, and his reading diet consisted of the newspaper and magazines, particularly Sports Illustrated, Guns and Ammo and Field and Stream.

Don wrote about what he knew for his fall writing sample "The Real Hunter." His voice was clear and strong when Don began by saying every American has the right to own guns and use them in a law-abiding fashion. The fashion Don preferred was hunting. Don then rebutted all of the major arguments against hunting in a well-organized, persuasive essay. His writing of this essay preceded our reading of "The Most Dangerous Game", so Don was well prepared with ammunition against the anti-hunters in class when

a lively debate concerning the issue of hunting took place before reading The Most Dangerous Game.

Don did admit he "likes to write about how he feels about a certain subject or the way he feels inside." He was given an opportunity to do that during journal writing time every day. Some of his entries reveal the pressure Don often felt to meet everyone's very high expectations for him, and the frustration that sometimes resulted. One such entry spoke of getting good grades, making the team, hours spent at practice, etc. Don said doing well didn't necessarily have all rewards, because once you've proven what you can accomplish, you constantly have to maintain that level of performance.

Living up to others' goals for them can make high performing students feel a loss of control. Don fights for that control by directing some of that anger at me, one of the school's drug-free representatives, during Red Ribbon Week:

Now is the time of our lives when we should do what we want to do. We need to take advantage of this time to have fun and be happy--no matter what it takes to be this. If you're happy spending all your time studying and doing homework then I don't see any reason why you should stop doing it. But, if it makes you happy to screw around with your friends, and go out on weekends, and party, then I don't see anything wrong with that. I think too many kids our age don't realize how much power they have over their own lives. The fact is we have almost total power. We just have to use this power more to our advantage -make your life the you want it to be. It really makes me angry when teachers, or parents, or friends try to make my life a certain way - and tell me "this is right "that is wrong" "Do this" "Don't do that." Red Ribbon week kind of reminds me of this. I don't use drugs, but I know people who do - and they have just as complete, and happy lives as I do - sometimes they're

better off, sometimes worse. I realize that the fact is that drugs are bad for you - but I'd rather be a happy drug user than a depressed kid who does everything right but never gets fulfillment out of life.

Later a more general anger is expressed toward everything when Don writes "I'm sick of being here. I'm sick of playing on a team of players who don't know how to compete at football. I'm sick of certain members of [the] distinguished faculty'. I'm sick of having to please everyone."

Don also told me he's sick of everything we read having to do with death. This is a legitimate complaint I have heard before. I believe his comment came at this point in response to "The Scarlet Ibis", and When the Legends Die. Don's copy-change of Hurst's passage about Doodle (see appendix) was about someone he knew who had died, and contained images of "tombstones," "graveyards," and "deterioration." Don's next paper was titled "Death." In deciding what to write about, Don "looked through [his] journal and found [he] wrote a lot about death."

Don's journal responses to death were personal and express the questions and fears which accompany the subject for most of us. His paper, however, allowed him some distance from the subject by providing him with an almost journalistic objectivity, perhaps influenced by his reading of newspapers and magazine articles. Following a catchy lead, Don concluded the next paragraph with an interesting thesis, "Well, the question that has been floating around in my head for quite some time is what if the religious explanation of death is fiction, completely bogus information?" Don questioned whether we go to a better place, or a horrible place, or just float around the world watching. Next he explored the existential possibility that we don't have souls and when we die we no longer exist. Reincarnation is the next possibility Don brought up. In conclusion, Don reminded the reader that none of us will be able to answer these

questions until we find out first hand. He adds a touch of humor by stating that he can wait.

Don's journal wasn't exclusively about death while reading When the Legends Die. The story's symbols also evoked responses about the different paths his life might lead him to, and the fact that dreams are an important part of life. Don's next copy-change of one of Borland's passages (see appendix) returned to a subject he is close to.

So Don entered the world of big-time college football, a world of long, hard practices, spectacular stadiums, demanding, hard nosed coaches, top notch football players and envious second stringers. And, with his determination, a world of clanking barbells, stadium steps, deserted tracks, protein filled kitchens, aching pain.

Don's journal at this time lamented the fact that he was a procrastinator. I believe he felt some disappointment in the fact that he was able to get away with it when he wrote, "Oh well I'm doing good so there's really no reason to make myself work any harder than I already do." Don procrastinated on his next paper until the night before it was due by watching football on T.V., where he got the idea for his paper titled "Sports". Again, Don used the journalistic, essay style of writing. Much of what Don had been saying is summed up nicely in the convincing introduction to this paper.

In the world of the 90's students are exposed to everything from drugs, to gangs, prejudice and racism. These pressures are only added to those of grades, parents, and friends. The fact is, the world today is a lot more complicated than it use to be. It is becoming increasingly difficult to excel in life. I believe that there is one activity that can help students in all facets of life. This activity is sports, both in and out of school.

Ironically, as Don claimed in this paper that "people are becoming too complacent about their jobs and their lives, they need to discover how to want to excel, and demand more of themselves", he turned in a pretty rough draft written in the same old five-paragraph essay format.

Don's journal continued to respond to our class discussion of When the Legends Die and the heroic quest theme by contemplating his own life's direction. His next paper was about goals in general, and, in his own words, "made [him] think about the path that [he] would like to take in life". The paper had all the charisma of a motivational speaker, but maintained an objective voice and the safety of the essay form.

Finally Don was given an assignment that really challenged him. While my regular English classes were given the assignment to write a biography about their choice of subject for their personal anthology, I asked my accelerated class to write a literary research paper concerning a major author, work or theme in literature. This assignment was meant to give them some exposure to the kind of work they would probably be asked to do if they continued on in accelerated and advanced placement classes in high school. Notice the dynamic voice in Don's journal as he wrote:

This is probably the worst assignment I've ever had. I don't like to read unless I have to, except magazines, and I don't know things about these stupid literary subjects. Literature is probably the most boring of all things I could possibly study or research. I have no clue what I will write on, I do know that it would be extremely difficult for me to find anything I am even remotely interested in.

Well, Don had felt the same way about the accelerated students' requirement to attend a cultural event outside of class each quarter. Acting on a hunch, I had suggested he go and see "A River Runs Through It". My hunch paid off, and Don had loved the film, writing up a rave review for his cultural event form that month. I capitalized on that

now by recommending that Don might like to read Maclean's story, and then look at some reviews of both the book and the movie as comparison for his paper. His next journal entry said that he might do a comparative essay on the book and the movie. Then Don earnestly wrote, "This is kind of a hard assignment for me, I don't know why. I hope I can find something interesting, I hate doing research papers on things that I don't find interesting." I realized that Don probably didn't come across things that were hard for him very often. I was somewhat anxious about how he would respond to an unfamiliar challenge, and it was heartening indeed to come across this journal entry which reads:

The book "A River Runs Through It" is totally amazing. For some reason I'm drawn to it and I constantly want to fall into its pages and read forever. It's also probably the only book I have ever spent quite a bit of time analyzing after I have read it. I think the combination of my interest in the characters and their lives along with the spectacular poetic writing Norman Maclean puts forth is what makes this book so special to me.

Don's literary research paper was an excellent essay reviewing Maclean's book and Redford's film. It doesn't go to outside sources to become a true research paper, but more important goals were achieved.

On his survey form at the beginning of the year Don had answered that his favorite stories were those told by his grandpa about his childhood and his life. I see both his grandfather's and Norman MacLean's influence in Don's final paper, "The Days of Summer."

Don's final journal entry predicted what the upcoming summer would be like, "football camp, training 5 times a week. I hope to get in a ton of waterskiing, many camping trips, a few fishing trips, and plenty of shooting, riding and just plan having fun." If this summer was anything like the previous summers described in his last piece,

it was fun. This paper had all the former strengths of his previous writing, but this time he added a personal touch. Don's personal voice conveyed the appreciated respite summers offered him from all the tensions of the school year. A few selected excerpts will illustrate:

The majority of my fondest memories have come from my summer vacations. I recall even as a young boy looking forward to the summer months, even then having the opportunity to spend my days in whatever facet I chose was a relief. . . . As I grew older I changed and so did my summers, although they still up to this day serve mainly as a time for relaxation. Friends started to become more vital, and searching for new and exciting forms of entertaining ourselves was a constant challenge. . . . My last summer was by far my favorite of all my previous ones. My days were spent doing all my favorite activities. I was basically free to come and go as I saw fit, which was the main reason I had such a great time.

The description in the next paragraph almost imitates Maclean's vivid descriptions of being in the river fly-fishing.

My favorite recreation was waterskiing. I thrive on this sport and summer is obviously the time to do it. Being out on the water on hot, sun filled days, cutting across the glassy water leaving nothing but a foamy wake behind. Swimming in the cool refreshing lake, eating odds and ends for lunch. These are the rewards I receive, and every day possible I was out there skiing.

With all the responsibilities he had, Don was still able to recognize the importance of having "time to just be kids and have fun." When reflecting on the experience of writing this memoir, Don said, "This unit kind of made me more aware of the many experiences I have had the opportunity to be a part of in my life. It made me more

appreciative of these memories too." I hope that, as uncomfortable as it was for him, exposure to stories helped provide him with the ability to perceive his life more fully and begin to tell his own story.

Don's story of being in freshman English contains a sort of evolution. Rebelling against both reading and writing, Don still used his journal writing time to vent his frustrations about the expectations imposed upon him. In this process of discovery, as Murray views it, Don submits his discouragement to the meaning-making that writing his story allows him. In doing so, Don perhaps becomes more sensitive to the need Fitzgerald describes story as being able to fill. Perhaps Don finally recognizes story's ability to mirror our lives in a significant way. When "falling into" the pages of Maclean's book, Don clearly enacts Rosenblatt's transactional reading theory. Don's reading/writing conversion is most dramatically exemplified in his growth from thumbing through hunting and sports magazines like Field and Stream and complaining in his journal about the lack of control in his life, to becoming the appreciative reader and analytical researcher of literature like A River Runs Through It, and the author of the stories he places importance on in his life.



### **"Tawni"**

Tawni was "embarrassed to admit" and "confesses" in her journal to liking school. With her long dark hair, straight cut bangs and daily wear of jeans and a t-shirt, she looked like a pretty typical kid, but she was not typical. Tawni put extra care into the preparation of her papers. Her fall writing sample was turned in with the first five drafts she did before writing the final copy. As Tawni described it, for her first paper "the entire idea was a girl that is a interesting artist who finds things about life in general and about her self." She came to this idea after ruling out several others. I was immediately impressed by Tawni's perseverance in drafting, and by the well developed story and specific descriptive imagery which resulted. Before writing this first paper, the students had been assigned to create a "self-collage" made from pictures and words that could be cut out of magazines and pasted onto poster paper, to represent who they are.

In Tawni's paper, "The Inspiration", the main character, an aspiring artist, has a conflict when given the assignment to create a painting based on an inspiration. After much reflection, the character goes to the ocean. Still dissatisfied after painting the ocean sunset, the artist wades into the water where she realizes how she must finish the painting.

I drew dreams as the waves crashed against the shore and chiseled rocks taking the beating from the waves. I painted half of the canvas wild and dreadful with lightning and dark clouds and the other calm and peaceful with birds floating on the warm breeze. Down the middle I drew myself. This

symbolized the ocean's turmoils, and conflicts in contrast to my happiness and loves of my life.

I can't help but wonder if the self-collage activity didn't have some impact on the topic of this story. The artist character makes meaning in her art by having it reflect her life, just as I see Tawni using her artistic writing ability to do the same..

Tawni's journal disclosed much about her personal life as she continued her daily writing. She spoke freely of her strong belief in and faith in God. Her life out of school revolved in great part around her religion and church. Much of her free time was spent having fun with what she refers to as "Youth Group".

In responding to questions about writing assignment number two, Tawni credited the idea for "Calico Kitten" to a story she'd heard from Youth Class at church. This story, Tawni wrote, is about "a girl in pain who is looking for relief." She decided to write about it, because she was "thinking about angels." "Calico Kitten" was the first person narrative of a girl who has a rather mystical experience as she walks through a moonless dark forest. The girl comes upon a well-lit, tattered cabin in the middle of a clearing. Inside was an old man with "flowing white hair and a silvery beard." Vivid, life affirming images of a kitten being fed by the man, and a daisy in a vase on the table, when it's fall and they aren't in bloom, enter the story. The man knows the girl, Anna, and also already knows the pain she suffers. He offers her advice, and plays her soothing music on his flute. Comforted, the girl falls asleep only to awaken in the forest's warm sun. There is no trace of the cabin or the man, but the pain in her heart was gone. As she heads for home, Anna discovers the calico kitten, which the man had been feeding, in her satchel, confirming that what she'd experienced wasn't just a dream.

This story was replete with almost Jungian symbolism, perhaps influenced by the collective consciousness where story resides. It at least had the elements of many

religious or spiritual stories Tawni may have heard at church or in her home. Through her story, Tawni seemed to explore her own doubts, questions and ultimate faith. The pain Tawni has experienced became more obvious as her journal progressed and her writing continued.

Just because many teens probably feel this way, it doesn't make the hurt any less when Tawni talked about rejection, and wrote "it's been three years since I had a boyfriend 'pathetic.' I don't think any guy likes me." In her journal, Tawni wrote about her heroes, based on questions I'd asked before reading When the Legends Die. She also had an imaginative prewrite from the point of view of a native American girl living in a teepee. Tawni seemed to identify very closely with the alienation experienced by the main character of Borland's novel. In Tawni's first copy-change, written while reading "The Scarlet Ibis" (see appendix), she wrote of the security of her first home. Now, while copy-changing a passage from Borland's novel (see appendix), Tawni writes:

So Tawni was thrown into a new family and a new life. A life of aggravating, disappointing arguments, loss of security, long nights alone in a new home, hurtful lectures and having no respect for each other and with my Father a life of sparse conversations, vague memories, touch and go vacations, twice a week visitations and feelings of being pulled like a rubberband.

Tawni was able to put her own life into the perspective of the heroic quest we used in class to chronicle Tom Blackbull's journey. She saw her birth as the departure and her mother and father's divorce, and her mother's subsequent remarriage, as trials. The threshold would come with high school, her rebirth with graduation, and Tawni looked to the future for her eventual return when she'll start anew, embarking on life alone for the first time after high school.

Tawni's ability to experience empathy for characters extended beyond those found in other stories to those she creates in the stories she writes. For her next paper, Tawni wrote "Letter to my Husband." In her survey she had already mentioned that letters are one of her favorite forms of writing. This piece about "a wife who longs for her husband who is at war", was determined "spur of the moment . . . while [she] was working on [her] History homework." During a conference, Tawni confirmed that she was studying a period of history involving war, but she also cited an episode from the T.V. show, Life Goes On, as having an influence on her choice of topic. Tawni's letter from a faithful wife keeping the hearth while her husband is away at war ends with a tragic afterward by the narrator:

Two months later a telegram came to Jessica's door. Jessica seemed to know who it was because she armed herself with accepting that he had died and would never come back. Her worst fear was he didn't read her letter before he died. She wanted him to know she loved him.

In the midst of personal journal responses to To Kill a Mockingbird, Tawni wrote about selecting a topic for writing assignment number four. "My story #4 is hard to write because I'm out of ideas. (Maybe) I love writing very descriptively because it seems that I get more out of it if I explain. Some of my writing I get just by writing one word."

Tawni responded on her paper's cover sheet that to decide on a topic she "caught it from thin air." She "thought of understudies and how usually they know more than the actor." We had dramatized the court room trial scenes from To Kill A Mockingbird in class, but I doubt that had any influence on Tawni's topic choice. She had named William Shakespeare and Romeo and Juliet as both a favorite author and story on her beginning of the year survey sheet. Now Tawni used this Shakespearean play as backdrop to her fictional story about a high school memory. Tawni created good character development

in this story about a high school prima donna playing the role of Juliet in the high school production. When she goes too far in stretching the director's patience, the narrator, Juliet's understudy is called in. Tawni's final draft ends rather humorously when the narrator attends her tenth year high school reunion and discovers that the prima donna actress from her high school days is as ditzy as ever. This is quite a change from the first draft's original conclusion which leaves off with the narrator seriously reflecting upon why her identity, and her classmates perceptions of her, had been so important. The final ending seems more appropriate to the overall light tone of the piece, but the original closure touches at the heart of something Tawni seemed to be exploring through her journal responses to the stories we'd been reading in class.

For third quarter's Personal Anthology unit, Tawni experimented with several options for a biographical research paper. Her journal makes mention of Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman, Whitney Houston, Keanu Reeves and Christian Slater. Tawni seemed to have finally settled on Martin Luther, "the father of her religion." I was surprised when Tawni switched her topic to Susan Brownwell Anthony. I had pointed out to the class that sometimes women had been left out of the history books and encyclopedias, so the librarian had ordered some books on notable American women to fill in the blanks. Tawni just gravitated towards them and took off. After writing the paper Tawni said "she was devoted totally to the women's right suffrage, she made drastic changes in us. Today if we didn't have Susan B. and Elizabeth Cady we wouldn't have been able to vote or wear other things than dresses. We wouldn't of had all those people who fought for the abolishment of slavery. Susan B. was a much incredible woman."

For their next biography, the students were to interview someone they could contact personally and then write it up. Many students interviewed friends, parents, relatives, and some even went out into the community to interview local professionals.

Tawni was able to interview one of her favorite authors, because he also happens to be a friend of her dad's. Tawni's interview paper began "My Father has known many people in his forty-six years on this planet. Of all of them, my favorite is Chris Crutcher!" I found it interesting to read in Tawni's paper that Mr. Crutcher "never reads any of his own [books] because he is sick of them by the time they're finished." Tawni was excited to discover that Chris Crutcher's favorite book is To Kill A Mockingbird, and she sees some influences of Harper Lee's novel on Crutcher's stories. Tawni told me during a conference that her telephone interview with Chris Crutcher went well because he is funny, and that made her relax. She learned about herself as a writer by asking him questions about his writing process, and seeing connections between the way he uses past experiences, just as she does.

Tawni wrote from these past experiences in her final two Personal Anthology pieces. Both autobiographical memoirs were based on childhood memories. When recalling firsts, Tawni remembered her first real vacation, and the story "Disneyland" resulted. Vivid childlike details brought back memories of road trips past. Tawni credited sharing with her group and hearing their stories with helping her to recall some specific images. The smell of her cousin's grapefruit juice lending to her feeling of car sickness as her family rode across the desert crammed into their Town and Country is just one example. Tawni didn't mention it, but I am reminded of an excerpt from Tobias Wolf's This Boy's Life, that I read aloud to the class, as I read her scene about traveling in the car. In fact, Tawni's short memoir is reminiscent of journey logs all the way through to its conclusion, "On the way back home I dreamed of the rides and whales coming back a little bit taller."

Tawni's eye for detail from a child's perspective was even more apparent in her final autobiographical piece, "Leaving." A very young girl's confusion when her mother

leaves on a trip for a whole week is relayed in a way that conveys that confusion from the child's point of view. "I was playing with my Grandma Jessie and it just hit me, my Mom had left me! I cried for about two minutes then decided that I would be OK because Grandma would play with me and that was all that mattered." Later in her story, Tawni described going to a building with glass doors and lots of people. When she didn't understand what was happening, she simply resumed playing with an interesting button on her jacket. She passed the time watching her Grandma do, as she called it, a hand trick; "She slid her hands up and down her arms without letting go, it was fascinating." Finally, from out of a tunnel of people came Tawni's mother. She was very happy and ready to go home. But first they must stop at a "big rotating thing." It looked like equipment she'd seen at a playground the day before, but her Grandma wouldn't let her play on it. After they pick their bags off of the play equipment, Tawni and her family are able to go home where she is secure in the presence of her mother again.

Tawni used story to make sense out of her life. Stories she's heard from both her Japanese background and her avid religious life contain strong archetypes and mythological patterns. The writing in Tawni's folder and her journal attempted to piece together both the pain she feels at rejection, family break ups and world events, and the gratitude she feels for her faith, friends and loving parents. Like the artist in her first paper, perhaps Tawni can reconcile this dissonance through the inspiration which at times can come through story.

Tawni's case chronicles much of what the researchers I cite in chapter one are talking about. She certainly demonstrates the discoveries Murray claims can be made while engaging in her multi-drafted writing process. Tawni also seems to have the ability Giacobbe refers to in being able to read her own work, occasionally discarding an early draft, written for herself, to revise the work for other readers. Tawni writes about what

she knows best. Her writing revolves around school, church and family. Tawni also illustrates Reif's point that reading and writing are integrated activities. She is an avid consumer of others' writing and at the same time is a critical reader of her own. Writing is a vehicle for Tawni to express her imaginations, longings, hopes and fears. Again, as Shall puts it, this writer celebrates and mourns the events in her life. Tawni has a sophisticated sense of the feel of stories, which gives her writing voice.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### CROSS CASE PATTERNS AND CONCLUSIONS

My quest reached the point at which I embarked upon conducting my classroom research project. I crossed this threshold during a year when I could not have asked for better subjects. The students I had in class that year were wonderful! This, despite the adverse conditions of a facility with a leaky roof which constantly threatened to damage the students' writing folders and caused us to rearrange the desks each day to accommodate the trash barrels collecting the constant drips of water. Perhaps the adversity pulled us together! At any rate, it was one of those years when the students were all so motivated and worked together so well that I kept thinking it was a dream and I didn't want to wake up.

The case studies I presented were not of my four "top" students. I could have selected students from many of the twenty cases from which I collected data, or from many of the other one hundred and ten students I didn't include in this study, and found them working hard as writers in a variety of interesting ways. The four students I chose represented a range in ability level, yet each of the four students had worked within their ability level to earn an A or B letter grade. I wanted to equally represent both boy and girl students. After determining these criteria, I also wanted the case studies to illustrate a variety of representative ways in which I observed students connecting with stories.

Andie seemed to demonstrate the way students can use their experience as readers of personal narrative to give powerful voice to the events in their lives. I felt that Justin represented the many students who escape into the world of fantasy as readers, yet reveal

the secrets of their own worlds as writers. Don exemplifies the high achieving student who excels both athletically and academically, but feels the burden of too much extrinsic pressure and uses the vehicle of reading and writing to discover himself. Tawni is like many girls who don't reveal much about what's going on inside until they're invited to tell their stories in writing which exposes their hopes and fears.

Of the students I did study whose folders were incomplete, thus rendering me with insufficient data, all of them turned in enough writing throughout each semester to earn a passing grade of C or D in my class. In fact, the same could be said for all but two of the other one hundred and ten students I had in class that year. Based on these students' pleased reactions to their passing grades, their grades that semester in other classes and previous grades in former English classes, I believe that they were experiencing success. I was further led to believe that, although they may not have enjoyed all of the same positive results as the students who earned As and Bs, story engaged these students in a way they might not otherwise have been hooked into English. Even when these students did not turn in a finished product, I observed them actively participating in the process, reacting to others' stories, telling their own and freewriting fluently in their journals.

This year was not entirely typical, nor was it extraordinary. Although this class from 1992-1993 connected in special ways, I have observed the same level of success in my students during previous years and since. I believe it is the combination of empowering students as authors by encouraging their unique voices and vital stories, and inviting students as readers to see the dynamic parallels between literature and their own lives, which is responsible for their successes. I had the good fortune to experience such success in my life, and it has been part of my quest to enable students to discover the power of such success in their own lives.

By connecting with story via reading, writing and sharing, students can become the authors and readers of their own and others lives. Close examination of Andie's, Justin's, Don's and Tawni's stories illustrated the particulars from which I have generalized when examining the reading/writing connections of all twenty of the students I studied.

I have observed that in each of these cases, the students used writing as a means of discovery, as Donald Murray would expect them to. What the students read certainly did have an effect on their ability to develop style as Mary Ellen Giacobbe, along with many others, postulate. I, like the more recent researchers I've cited, wanted to go deeper into the connection which exists between students' responses to what they read and how the students make meaning of their life experiences through the stories they write. Does such a relationship exist?

In each of the four cases, I have revealed that there was a reading/writing connection which went beneath surface level bonds to the heart of the important feeling of stories. I have attempted to do this the hard way . . . looking at the process instead of the products, the tellers rather than the tales (Fitzgerald 105). I have tried, as Hairston put it, to examine the intangible. By inquiring into the writer's own thoughts about the process through interview, cover sheets and journals, the untouchable becomes something we can begin to grasp.

### **Patterns**

The four case studies I have detailed in the previous chapter look at the specifics of an individual story. It was also interesting to scan the data collected from the larger number of students I studied. Can we make generalizations about the relationship between stories students are exposed to and stories that result in the students' writing?

Some patterns were revealed when the students' responses to surveys, cover sheet questionnaires and interview questions were analyzed.

Initial data concerning the students' attitudes towards reading and writing was collected from survey sheets the students filled out at the beginning of the year. Students were asked about their favorite stories and authors, and how they view themselves as readers and writers. The favorite stories of six of the students I studied fell into the genre of fantasy, although seven of the students mentioned that stories told by family members are their favorites. Favorite authors mentioned were those writers of fantasy: Terry Brooks, Anne McCaffrey, J.R.R. Tolkien and Lloyd Alexander. Other authors mentioned were R.L. Stine, Stephan King and Tom Clancy. Four of the twenty students did not know who their favorite author was, or didn't have one.

Surprisingly, sixteen out of twenty of the students I researched did say they read for pleasure outside of class, usually as an evening activity just before bed. Even the remaining four students mentioned at least reading magazines and/or newspapers on a regular basis. No students stated that they never read outside of school for pleasure.

When asked if they view themselves as writers, the twenty students were evenly split with nine reporting yes, they write or enjoy writing, and another nine reporting no, they don't like to write, don't feel competent at it, or they only write when they have to. The remaining two students reported "kind of" and "sometimes" viewing themselves as writers. Based on this information, more students viewed themselves as readers than as writers, perhaps because these students had had more experience as readers. Still, by looking at the writing they produced over the course of the year, patterns emerge which reveal connections these readers made as writers.

## First Assignment

### Connecting with Death

In order to see what influences of reading on the writing might be there, I allowed students complete self-selection in the topic and form of their assigned papers. For the first writing assignment, seven students wrote about death. This was not surprising since many students were strongly moved by our recent reading of The Scarlet Ibis in class. Although I allowed students the freedom of self-selection in their writing assignments, I fear assigning copy-changes might have swayed some writers toward topics they might otherwise not have chosen. Now I can't be entirely sure whether it was the literature itself, or the imitation of a passage from that literature, that may have resulted in a related paper written by the student. Still, it appears that by reading about death many students felt permitted to then write about their experiences with, or questions about, death. It might have been easier, when reading The Scarlet Ibis, to focus the students attention on less risky themes or analysis of the structure of the story. But, by allowing the students to determine which parts of the text they responded to, what they really cared about was revealed.

Reader-responses to this story included personal experiences with the death of a grandparent, a father, a little sister and friends. Students were very open about sharing these responses with the class, and the more students shared with one another, the more stories came to the surface. If one of my administrators had come in to do an observation, I'm afraid he or she might have thought I was running a psychotherapy group, rather than an English class. Luckily, I had participated in enough writing workshops on my own to know that writing and sharing our real lived stories doesn't come without tears, laughter and getting quite personal at times. Many of these stories then show up in the students' writing.

Tina had read not only The Scarlet Ibis, but was reading A Separate Peace as well. That coupled with the deaths of both an uncle and a cousin within the past year, had "really given [her] something to think about." Her thinking results in a poem which explores the concept of death. Rikki had written about the death of her great-grandfather in her copy-change of the passage from The Scarlet Ibis. She then continued to write about his death for this assignment. In describing her experience writing this paper she said, "I took a blanket outside and wrote this I started to cry during some of the writing but the other parts just brought back memories. Overall it make me happy to write." When Rikki expressed feeling these dichotomous emotions during the process of writing this paper, she captured the essence of how we learn to make meaning of our life experiences through story.

About a paper she had written, Andie wrote "it made me sad to write it and I wanted to talk to [his] daughter." An adult friend had recently died and she "had been thinking about him and his family." Both his funeral and the copy-change gave her the idea for her paper. Andie's writing motivated her to take action. After writing her piece about the death of a friend, she wanted to visit the family. Perhaps being able to reflect upon the events in our lives by writing and through story we become more able to take action and do those things we can do to reach out and connect with others.

After looking through his journal and realizing that many of his entries dealt with death, Don wrote his paper about death in general. He found the experience "very thought provoking." Although Don was still playing it safe by writing about death from an objective distance, he still explored questions which I'm sure were very important to him. "What if the religious explanation of death is fiction, completely bogus information? . . . What if we don't have souls or spirits?" These same questions remain with many of us throughout life. I believe it is critical to provide students with a safe

place to ask these questions. This requires respecting students' stories concerning the doubts they experience about life as they encounter the trials along their journey.

### Connecting with Fantasy

Five students wrote fantasy stories, evidently influenced by their out of class reading. Why do these students, and many others, escape into the world of fantasy? It quite possibly provides the security of a safe haven where the world is replete with expected patterns they can depend on. Terry tells me it is because he "really like[s] fantasy epics [that he] decided to write one." He got the idea for his story from "the stories [he] read." Jason wrote a fantasy about "heroism -- a man has to destroy an army of robots." He cited his influence as being ". . . factory workers loosing jobs to machines." This particular student is very into machines himself. He knows enough about computers to have a legitimate concern, in his own mind, about machine power replacing human value. This is also a common sci-fi theme. Justin wrote, instead of a fantasy, a humorous piece. He read fantasy, and although his paper is not one, I saw the influence of fantasy sequel stories in the fact that his paper is a continuation of his fall writing sample, and has "to be continued" at its conclusion.

All three of these students had caught on that since they could use freewriting time in their journals to write about anything each day, and since they knew their upcoming writing assignments would be self-selected, they could use their journals as a place to compose the first draft ideas for upcoming sequels to their adventures. Each day then, for at least ten to fifteen minutes, they could dive back into the quest they'd forged with the characters and plots they'd created.

### Connecting with Others

Beth and Julie got the idea for their papers from discussions with other students and friends. The papers that resulted were a story about physical abuse, and an essay about abortion. Abortion and physical abuse illustrate the types of issues adolescents want to explore. Putting these issues into story allows them to connect with those less pleasant aspects of the outside world from which they are sometimes sheltered. (Unfortunately, not all students are sheltered from these and other sad realities). These topics are often considered taboo as research or speech material. Permitting self-selection of writing topics provides a vehicle for students to explore issues like these. Couched in the form of story, students can attempt to make sense of the sometimes seemingly senseless events in the world around them.

Even though the characters are animals, in his story, Eric explores issues of cruelty, indifference and justice in his fable-like story of a mouse being hunted by a raven. Eric wrote a paper about animals, inspired by the possible topics listed by students on a chart at the back of the room. After he shared a draft of his animal paper with his group, other students saw a connection between his story and a story called The Lion and the Mouse. The writing style Eric's story exhibited could have been influenced by the many fables children read and hear as they grow up. Each of these students connected with others' stories in some way.

### Connecting with Past Experience

During this writing assignment two students were reading Sabrina and Secret, Silent Screams outside of class. I do not know what these stories are about, so I am unable to interpret their possible influences on these students' papers. They seemed to rely on personal experiences for the ideas from which their stories came. Margaret described her story as "a teenage girls relationship with a lake." Her idea came from "a



lake near [her] house. It isn't very pretty but [she] like[s] to sit by it." Julie has a secure, happy home. According to her it was her experience with having lived in San Francisco that gave her the idea to write about "a day in the life of a homeless boy and cruelty." In both cases these students used experiences from their own lives as material for their stories. Margaret used an important element from nature as a symbol in her story.

Although the real lake, according to her, "isn't very pretty," she imbued it with the value it had for her through the writing of her story. Julie seemed able to somewhat order her memories of the homeless in San Francisco by focusing on a character she took through the experience of being homeless. Her homeless boy underwent a quest which gave his life some dignity amidst the many lives Julie had seen wasted on the streets of San Francisco.

### Connecting with Mystery

Sam, who said he likes mystery, wrote a mystery, borrowing, for his main character, Sherlock Holmes. This writer enjoyed reading Tom Clancy outside of class, and we'd read Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "The Red-headed League" together in class. Mitch and Paul also wrote mysteries, which might also have been influenced by our reading of the Sherlock Holmes short story. Mystery, like many of the other story connections students made on this first assignment, follows a type of quest motif in the detective's attempt to solve the mystery. It has fairly common conventions, like fantasy, that the student can feel comfortable with. Like the student fantasy writers, these mystery writers demonstrate the theory that the genre a student writer chooses is influenced by the genre they prefer to read.

## Second Assignment

### Connecting with Other Disciplines

As we got further into the school year, I observed several interdisciplinary influences in the students' next self-selected writing assignments. By this time the students were smart enough to figure out that they could use papers they were working on for other classes as their self-selected writing topic for English. Even when a paper was not required in another class, they were using their writing as a place to study and synthesize what they were learning in other disciplines.

Eric's subject was diamonds. "In science we did diamonds so I wrote an essay on diamonds." According to him, "the science subject is what influenced me to write this paper." There is Andie, whom I mentioned in the last chapter wrote "Glaciers" in response to a heavy homework load and an upcoming test in science. Tawni wrote the fictional letter from a wife to her husband who is away at war. She got the idea while working on homework for history class, which dealt with a period of war from our country's history.

I love the idea of students writing across the curriculum, and am delighted that students were clever enough to use the opportunity for self-selection to work on material for other disciplines in their English class, where they had a writing community to get feedback and response from as they engaged in the writing process.

### Connecting with Television

Tawni believes she may also have been influenced by an episode of the T.V. show, Life Goes On. She isn't the only student who was inspired by the muse of television. Don, from my case studies, got the idea for his paper's subject, "the importance of sports", while "watching football on T.V.." Television probably has a great influence on how students view story. The one-half hour plot lines most prime-time situation comedies and dramas follow can perhaps be viewed in students' stories. I did not explore this issue, but it might be interesting material for future study. In the case of my research, the greatest influence T.V. had was in time students spent away from reading or completing writing assignments to watch it.

### More Connections

Two students, Rikki while sick and Julie while babysitting, began pondering "what ifs" which resulted in writing topics. I can't help but wonder if students were not allowed to exercise some choice in their writing, would they use opportunities to ponder life's what ifs? Does the knowledge that they'll be creating stories cause students to compose and rehearse as writers in a way they otherwise would not? Rikki questioned "if [her] life could be any worse and [she] came up with this story." She described the subject as "a made up life of a girl who life fell apart but she put it together herself." While babysitting, Julie "was laying there thinking what if there was a fire." According to her, she'd gotten the idea two years ago and this seemed like a good opportunity to write about it. I'm glad if these self-selected writing assignments gave students the opportunity to write the stories they'd been mentally rehearsing, but had been too busy, most likely writing what the teacher wanted, to ever get them down on paper.

Julie was so filled with good writing ideas that she helped Beth, from the same class, come up with her subject; "a psycho girl and her 'elf' friends." A book called The

Afternoon with the Elves was also listed by the writer as an influence. Justin and Terry maintained their dedication to the continuation of their earlier papers: the fantasy and the comedy. It was exciting to see students collaborating as writers, sharing ideas and helping one another.

Although we had not yet gotten to the fourth quarter five week unit spent exclusively reading and writing poetry, students read poems which connected thematically to the literature in class, and we'd written the "I Am" poems and haikus and cinquains in response to the two novels. Three other students, Sam, Shannon and Sarah, wrote poetry. "A Classic Christmas" was being read by Sam who wrote his poem about Christmas, "out of past experiences, past x-mases." The narrative quality of poetry, and ways in which it could be viewed as story, is another interesting topic. I chose not to attempt it as part of this study, which is why I postponed the poetry unit until fourth quarter after I had collected the data for my project.

### **Third Assignment**

#### Freedom to Choose

I warned students that this next paper would be the last truly self-selected writing assignment of the year. During the next unit, I would be requiring that the students write non-fiction biographical and autobiographical pieces. Terry, Justin and Eric, who had been committed to their continuing sagas, used this last opportunity to bring their fantasy and comedy sequels to a close. These boys' heroic characters underwent final trials to return to their just rewards. Justin's "Frank Clinton" got his promotion to "captain of the new base in Cuba." Eric's adventurous teens "got home and had a huge dinner." Terry's "Brone" stands in the "silence [which] filled the small valley where the battle took place. Druid fire still burned upon the rocks and boulders, and the face of the mountain was

stained black." Only Terry could not let go just yet and still added "To Be Continued . . ." to the bottom of this last page. I'd like to think this means that Terry will continue to write this saga, not for me or the class, but because he wants to. I encouraged him to look into sci-fi/fantasy magazines for advertisements concerning publication possibilities.

Jason wrote about his dog, Lady, who had died earlier that month. "Since this was the last writing assignment that I get to choose what to write about, I decided to write about this." He "couldn't hardly write it without crying." If Jason had been postponing the grieving process, he willingly took this opportunity to finally deal with his grief. Writing about his dog, Lady, expressed the value her life had had, at least to one boy. Jason provided a picture of Lady attached to the final draft of his paper. He hung around after class that day to make sure I'd seen it. I assured him that I had, and later let him know how much I appreciated this story about his beloved dog.

About her experience writing about a guy who has ESP, Sarah writes, "I always wanted to start a story like this, so I did." Personal experience was responsible for Rikki's story about snow cat skiing with her dad and brother, although her new ski jacket gave her the idea. Julie used writing time to debrief about her job shadowing experience for her occupations class. "Achieving goals" was the topic of Don's paper which made him "think about the path that [he] would like to take in life." Collections of poetry on a variety of topics were also turned in for this last self-selected assignment. All of the many connections I'd observed appeared in this group of papers. It seems that in each case, students made full use of this "last chance" to write what they wanted.

It is evident that student writers valued the opportunity to choose for themselves what they wrote about, and how they wrote it. The empowered authorship this gave the students came through in the wide range of topics they chose and the voice they gave these pieces. With this in mind, you can understand my reluctance to begin assigning

work from a specific genre. Yet I wanted to focus more closely on the power of personal narrative in making story connections with my students.

### **Fourth Assignment**

For this final writing unit, students were asked to write biographies and autobiographies. Although the genre was determined by me, students were allowed to select the subjects of these papers. Students produced a "Personal Anthology" consisting of one or two autobiographical pieces, and two biographies: one based on an interview, and the other based on research collected from sources in the library. Students were able to choose from which of these pieces I should take their major grade for this unit. Almost twice as many students chose their autobiographies for me to grade, with the remainder almost evenly split between the two biographies.

It would appear that students preferred their own stories to others' stories in general. Some students may have used the choice to pick their biography as a means of protection from exposing something too personal in their autobiographies. For some students, telling someone else's story was easier than telling their own. Along with respecting students' stories, I respected the students' right not to tell their stories when they really didn't want to. Even when writing about others, I believe they learned about themselves in the substitute experience of reading and writing about someone's life. Students picked the subjects of their autobiographies for a reason. It seems evident that among those reasons were admiration and personal identification.

#### Biography

By interviewing her mom, Tina glimpsed "more of a real person side to her not just a mom." This showed in the biographical profile of her mother that resulted. Tina composed the heroic quest of sorts her own mother had undergone as she worked her way through many jobs while getting married and having children. Juggling career and family are at the top of the very trials many women face today. Tina also wrote about the strength of a woman from history -- Betsy Ross. By writing about these strong feminine

figures, Tina quite possibly came to understand much about her own female identity. Shared stories can give future generations the strength and ability to transcend stereotypes and an appreciation of what predecessors have gone through to break down the barriers they may face.

"Stories and documentaries on Michael" were what Sam said influenced his biography about Michael Jackson. Because I coached a school dance club and judged auditions for the talent show, I happen to know that Sam loved to dance (and was quite good at it I might add). I believe that Sam identified with, "the little prince of soul," as his research paper described Jackson. When Sam concluded his biography about Michael Jackson, "the greatest musician ever is well on his way to dominating the 1990's," he could not have predicted his hero's fall only a year later. I can't help but wonder how students view their cultural heroes' real life quests in the face of Michael Jackson's molestation charges or basketball stars, Magic Johnson's battle with aids, and Michael Jordan's father's senseless murder. Perhaps it will be in their heroes' abilities to overcome obstacles, rather than to break record charts or fiberglass backboards, that truly heroic traits will be revealed. It is Drew Barrymore's rise and fall as an actress, and her on-going battle with drug addiction that attracted Rikki to research Barrymore's life for her biography. After reading Little Girl Lost, Rikki wrote her biography on Drew Barrymore because, "just hearing her life well it made me want to tell others."

Justin very thoughtfully had me grade his biography about Aristotle because "[he] thought it would be more education for [me]." He obviously appreciated the learning that took place by reading the stories of others's lives and he, like Rikki, wanted to share what he had learned with others. Buddy Holly's music inspired Terry to write a biography about Holly's life. Terry said he was also influenced by the sources listed in his bibliography. Buddy Holly's tragic early death, along with others: Janis Joplin, Jimi



Hendrix, Jim Morrison, James Dean, Marilyn Monroe, etc., seems to have given him heroic status amongst this generation. It is interesting that Terry said he "learned a lot about his classmates" working on this project. It may be that we learn from writing with others as well as writing about others.

### Autobiography

We did a lot of sharing with one another as a writing community during the Personal Anthology unit. About this experience, Andie wrote: "From telling my stories to my group I remembered alot more than if I would have just been thinking about it. Alot of things that were said in class also triggered little things that I added to my autobiography." It seems true that the more opportunity we have to tell our stories, the more we recall about the events which have shaped our lives. Her memory had been originally triggered by the photograph of herself at a gymnastics meet.

The storytelling and writing that occurred during this unit provided Don with this experience: "This unit kind of made me more aware of the many experiences I have had the opportunity to be a part of in my life. It made me more apreciative of these memories too." Perhaps by sharing our stories we more fully understand the significance of the events of in our lives. This may result in a greater respect for our own and others' stories. Don's autobiography was prompted by a picture as well. Tawni referred to this unit as a "real" project. By real, I believe she implied that she learned more through involvement with stories than she otherwise might have. Her memoir of a family trip to Disneyland was recalled by brainstorming "firsts" with the class.

After "mapping" their childhood neighborhoods, "when group members talked about the 'haunted house' or 'witch' on their block," Julie recalled "a neighbor [she] had . . . considered a weirdo." Her recollection was recorded in the piece, "The Dirt Man". She

was also reading The Evildoer and All Around the Town by Mary Higgins Clark.

Reflecting upon the experience, Julie said, "when I wrote this story about this man whom we were all scared of it helped me to see things in perspective and how we really didn't give the man a chance." Her story gave her the chance to recognize the basic dignity in all people's lives. It is an example of how storytelling can help us gain respect for one another. Julie continued, "The unit brought back a flood of wonderful memories that hopefully someday I'll write up." I hope future English classes will give her that opportunity.

Our "scar stories" brought up the memory of "One Fourth of July" for Jason, who stated that, "telling people about yourself can make you look like a fool." Yes, the fool! The foil to our hero. It is good to know that we play both roles, and I admired Jason's frank recognition of this fact! Margaret chose her autobiography because "it tells about me." She explained that "it is about the day when my father left." Her autobiography about an event involving her father demonstrates the understanding of how others' actions affect our lives. It is one of the conventions of memoir writing to see our lives in relation to the lives of those we are involved with. Some critics hypothesize that this convention is especially true of women autobiographers. Perhaps it is true of girls, or adolescents in general, whose lives are often controlled by the decisions and actions of the adults around them. Margaret's memory was triggered by the map she drew. In explaining what recalled his autobiographical piece, "The Car Incident", Eric described telling his mother about what we were doing in class. "She reminded me of the time that I ran over my cousins arm." When asked about the connectedness of stories he commented, "Well when you read other stories and books you sometimes get ideas from them. Or in my case it was my mother." I especially like this example of the valuable connections which can be made between parents and children when family stories are shared.

### **Reflections on the Students' Responses**

Across all these cases, I observed that students used the opportunity to self-select their writing assignments to write things that really mattered to them. Because of this, most students actually used their journals as writers' notebooks: a place to generate and collect ideas to later develop into writing for an audience. Although I observed many connections between the students' reading and their writing, the writers often answered "no" when asked if they could see any influences on their writing. Upon examination, this does not surprise me. First of all, many students have been cautioned against plagiarism, and may have connotations of this concept that made my query appear to be more of an accusation than a question. Secondly, these developing writers are just beginning to feel confident in their writing ability, so they may view recognizing an influence as giving someone else "credit" for their creation.

It is not so important that students recognize this connection; It's of more value that they feel empowered as authors to use what they know about story to shape their lives. It's enough that English teachers see this powerful relationship at work. We are in a better position to reflect upon these connections from the vantage of a theoretical construct, yet even we can only hope, as Jerome Bruner has stated, to interpret the reader/writer's interpretation in as full a way as possible (35). At this point, there's no real need for the developing writers to be aware of the connections. Sometime later in their lives, they may become aware of these powerful connections, as I did. This may happen only for those who sense this connection subconsciously enough to continue their commitment to reading and writing. That may only happen if students are allowed to personally connect with story in an important way (Fitzgerald 96).

The process of not only experiencing the importance of story, but consciously being aware of its interconnections could take years of involvement with "literacy" as Irwin and Doyle define it (12). Conducting such a study might require the tracking of readers/writers over a period of many years, and the researcher, of course, would also have to have already come to this realization. This being the case, I would be dead, or at least well into senility, before being able to categorically prove quantitatively that this connection exists. The lengthiness of such a project could be the cause of its intangibility (Hairston 84). I do believe, however, that within the qualitative nature of this study the general truths revealed through story are clear: students connect with story through reading and writing in numerous and powerful ways.

### **Observable Connections**

The connections between the stories they see, read and hear, and the stories they tell and, given the opportunity, write, which I have observed in the students I've studied during this research project, are influenced by: in class readings, out of class reading, what the students are doing in other classes at school, T.V. shows, pop culture, music, holidays, personal experiences, sharing with other members of the writing community established in their English class, and others' stories. I also recognize the connections with family stories and the influence of religion and church in some students' stories.

Students are surrounded by real life events. As they begin to see these events as stories with all their inherent patterns, rather than as random meaningless events, they may be better able to make sense of it all and learn from these occasions. Once students become writers, life is no longer just happening to them; they can begin making sense of their lives as they reflect upon them through narrative. It could be vital in this information age that students are able to glean narrative knowledge from the stimulus

overload they are often exposed to. The meaning-making process narrative provides can help students recall memories from their pasts, think about their futures and value the present.

These cross-case observations would support my premise that students do connect with stories. After studying this process, I have also observed that stories bond students with one another in a way they might not otherwise connect. It is the process of using story to create a bond which can create the magic of a real reading and writing community in an English classroom. Confirming this notion by doing this research project has been an invaluable experience for me. I will continue to use story in my classroom to enable students to get to the heart of what's important to them, to shape the meaning of their own experience, and to be empowered as authors who have a story to tell.

### **Conclusion**

So this is my story of how I have come to connect reading, writing and literature in my classroom as a way to illuminate the importance of story. Seeing the powerful connections in the cases I studied during the course of this Master's project has confirmed my commitment to use reader-response to literature so students can identify more personally with the text, allow self-selected writing to give students the opportunity to write their stories and integrate reading and writing in my classroom. I hope that it will enable students to respect the value of each person's story as they embark on their quest for self-discovery. Work on this project has also strengthened my desire to operate within my teaching community to encourage educators to look at their own teaching environments to see if their classrooms are conducive to student learning. I would encourage using narrative as a way to create a such a climate. Through writing and/or presenting, I will gladly share my classroom stories with others to create the connections

that will sustain us all along our professional journey. I appreciate those who have shared their classroom stories to inform and educate me. "On this trip we take" as teachers "we owe it to each other to respect our stories and learn from them" (Coles 30). This can be done through on-going classroom research and sharing the experiences which result. Sharing my story has been, perhaps, part of my own humble heroic quest as I grope to find meaning on this trip I take.

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## APPENDIX

### **Copy-Change Passages**

#### from James Hurst's "The Scarlet Ibis"

It's strange that all this is still so clear to me, now that the summer has long since fled and time has had its way. A grindstone stands where the bleeding tree stood, just outside the kitchen door, and now if an oriole sings in the elm, its song seems to die up in the leaves, a silvery dust. The flower garden is prim, the house a gleaming white, and the pale fence across the yard stands straight and spruce. But sometimes (like right now), as I sit in the cool, green-draped parlor, the grindstone begins to turn, and time with all its changes is ground away-- and I remember Doodle (189).

#### from Hal Borland's When the Legends Die

So Tom entered the world of small-time rodeo, a world of hot, dusty little cow-country towns, makeshift arenas, vicious, unpredictable horses, ambitious country riders and jealous third-rate professionals. And, with Red Dillon, a world of noisy saloons, smoky pool halls, ratty little hotels, fly-specked chili parlors, conniving bettors (107).

## Questionnaires

### Questions on Survey Sheet

1. What is/are your favorite story(ies)?
2. Who is/are your favorite author(s)?
3. Do you read for pleasure outside of school requirements?
4. What have you read most recently?
5. What is your favorite thing to read?
6. Do you consider yourself a writer? Why or why not?
7. What do you most like to write?
8. What have you written most recently?
9. Have you ever had your writing published? If so, how or where?
10. What are your writing strengths and weaknesses? List both please.
11. What do you want to learn about reading and writing in English class this year?
12. How do you suggest we work together as a class to do that?

### Sample Questions from a Writing Assignment Cover Sheet

1. What is the subject of this paper?
2. How did you make the decision to write on this topic?
3. Where did you get the idea for this paper? Describe the source.
4. Did any other story you've read or heard have an influence on this paper? If so, which story? Where did you see, read or hear it? How do you think it had an impact on this paper?
5. What else can you tell me about your experience with writing this paper?
6. What have you read lately either out of class or for another class?

**Permission Letter**

Dear Parent and Student,

I will be spending this summer writing my graduate thesis to fulfill requirements for my Master's Degree in English. My thesis will be based upon research I have conducted in my classroom over this past year. I am looking carefully at how the stories we share in class, through discussion and literature, affect the stories students tell and the written papers which result. I would like to use work from your/your child's writing folder and journal as supportive data for my thesis. I have selected this work as data because of the interesting ways in which it will inform my study. School district policy requires that I protect the anonymity of the district, the school and the student. With your permission, I will copy the contents of the writing folder, and keep the journal over the summer, returning it by mail when my project is complete. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Veronica L. Daley

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes, you have permission to use the contents of my/my child's writing folder and journal as data for your project.

Student's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature \_\_\_\_\_



## **Proposal to District Research Committee**

### Connecting with Stories through Writing

Stories are important to developing adolescents and that importance reveals itself through the connections made between the stories students read and hear, and the stories they write. I would like to study the fourteen and fifteen-year-old students in my classroom to discover how these connections reveal themselves in the students' writing.

During second and third quarter of the 1992-1993 school year I will be noting observations of the approximate one-hundred students in my English 1-2 classes in a reflective log. I will probe deeper than the easily observable by developing a cover sheet I will ask students to respond to when turning in writing assignments. I will audio-tape conferences I will hold with students concerning their writing processes. I will collect students' writing in folders, and have students keep journals in which I can track their prewriting strategies. All students in each of the five English 1-2 classes will provide context and background for the study. I will select a few subjects which especially inform my study as my research progresses.

I will categorize and chart my collected data during third quarter of this year looking for meaningful patterns to emerge which illustrate the kinds of connections which occur between stories and student writing. The report of my project's findings will be written during the summer of '93. It will provide background and context for the study, a review of literature on the subject of reading/writing connections, sections describing the case studies I choose, and my interpretations of the study. I will respect the confidentiality of both the school and the students and take full responsibility for protecting their rights by discussing school and classroom in general terms, and not referring to students by their actual names. I will also secure written permission from students used as case studies, and their parents.

I will be happy to submit a copy of the proposal I have written for my thesis committee, provide additional information, or answer any questions you may have.

\* Approved by the School District's Research Committee September 1992