DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 266 460                                        CS 209 525

AUTHOR          Davis, Ken, Ed.
TITLE           The Responding Reader: Nine New Approaches to
                Teaching Literature.
INSTITUTION     Kentucky Council of Teachers of English.
PUB DATE        82
NOTE            102p.
AVAILABLE FROM  National Council of Teachers of English, 1111 Kenyon
                Rd., Urbana, IL 61801 (Stock No. 40858, $3.50 member,
                $4.00 nonmember).
PUB TYPE        Collected Works - Serials (022) -- Guides - Classroom
                Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052)
JOURNAL CIT     Kentucky English Bulletin; v32 n1 Fall 1982

EDRS PRICE      MF01/PC05 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS     Critical Reading; Higher Education; Inservice Teacher
                Education; Literary Criticism; *Literature
                Appreciation; Poetry; *Reader Response; *Reader Text
                Relationship; Secondary Education; *Teaching
                Methods
IDENTIFIERS     *Affective Response; Burke (Kenneth)

ABSTRACT
                Articles in this journal issue explore the
relationship between the reader and the literature text, and discuss
ways that instruction can enhance reader response to that literature.
Following an introduction summarizing the nine articles, the titles
and their authors are as follows: (1) "It Is the Poem That I Remake:
Using Kenneth Burke's Pentad to Help Students Writing about Robert
Frost's 'Mending Wall'" (Joseph Comprone); (2) "How Did You Like It?
The Question of Student Response and Literature" (Charles R. Duke);
(3) "Eliciting Response to Literature" (Joan W. Graham and Robert E.
Probst); (4) "A Reader-Response Approach to the Teaching of
Literature" (Sandra Harris); (5) "Enhancing Response to Literature:
An Inservice Approach" (Susan S. Kissel and Peter M. Schiff); (6)
"From Response to Analysis: Strategies for Involving Students in
Thinking about Literature" (Kathleen W. Lampert); (7) "Responding to
Literature from Within: The Untold Story Game" (Gary M. Salvner); (8)
"Clustering for Reader Response to Creative Writing" (Patricia
Schatteman); and (9) "The Writer, the Reader, the Poem: An Inquiry
Approach to Poetry" (Denny T. Wolfe, Jr.). (HTH)

# Kentucky English Bulletin

Special Issue

## THE RESPONDING READER
### Nine New Approaches
### to Teaching Literature

Volume 32   Fall 1982   Number 1

# KENTUCKY ENGLISH BULLETIN

Volume 32                    Fall 1982                    Number 1

# INTRODUCTION: THE RESPONDING READER

In his article for this issue, Gary Salvner writes, "The oldest new word in literature pedagogy is 'response.'" It's true. Concern for the student's own response to literature is an old theme, but one on which English teachers at all levels are working new and exciting variations. As evidence, I submit this issue of the Kentucky English Bulletin on "The Responding Reader."

The eleven authors of these nine articles make up a fair cross-section of our profession. The six Kentuckians are joined by five out-of-staters, and the seven university faculty share these pages with four high-school teachers, members of a group too little heard from in professional publications. Welcome to all.

I've struggled with ways of grouping these articles, but my efforts have been confounded by the mix, in almost every article, of theory, pedagogy, and applications to specific works. So the alphabet will have to do.

Joe Comprone, therefore, leads off by providing a useful and generalizable map for guiding students through a Frost poem; Joe's notes alone are worth the price of this issue, constituting an almost definitive bibliography on reader-response criticism. Charlie Duke surveys the field from his own humane perspective and opens fresh, surprising windows into the minds of student readers.

Georgians Joan Graham and Bob Probst offer valuable historical perspective, then provide detailed, specific teaching techniques; I plan to try some of them right away. Sandra

3

Harris gives a concise introduction to reader-response methods, then illustrates with her own materials for teaching of Of Mice and Men; if you want to know what the reader-response approach is all about, this may be the article to start with.

Susan Kissel and Peter Schiff generously summarize their NEH workshop for those of us not lucky enough to attend, and Massachusetts high-school teacher Kathleen Lampert takes us through a wonderful, workable unit on narrative fiction. Gary Salvner next shares his "Untold Story Game," a ready-to-copy and ready-to-use classroom simulation; I know Gary will appreciate receiving copies of the "front pages" that result from this activity.

Patricia Schatteman describes her use of the invention technique called "clustering" as a tool for focusing her students' response to literature; I'm confident that you'll find immediate use for it. Finally, Denny Wolfe turns responding readers into responding writers in an exciting unit in which students both write and read poems.

Again, thanks to the authors whose work appears herein; they could have published it anywhere, so I'm grateful that they chose the Kentucky English Bulletin.

Articles are still sought, on any aspect of the teaching of English, for the Winter 1982 issue; deadline is November 1. As always, the Spring 1983 issue will feature the winners of the KCTE Student Writing Contest. The Fall 1983 issue will be on "The Computerized English Class"; submissions will be welcome until August 1, 1983.

Ken Davis

6

# IT IS THE POEM THAT I REMAKE:   USING KENNETH BURKE'S PENTAD TO HELP STUDENTS WRITE ABOUT ROBERT FROST'S "MENDING WALL"

Joseph Comprone, University of Louisville

## I
## Background Theory

Recent literary theory has begun to re-focus our attention as teachers. Structuralists and reader-response critics encourage teachers to make the "act" of reading the central concern in our teaching, just as many educational theorists in the 20th century have encouraged teachers to move from a focus on subject to a focus on students as they learn.[1] What types of questions might teachers who wish to attend to the actual reading process rather than to the end result--the message or final meaning--ask themselves as they p epare to teach a modern poem, in this case, Robert Frost's "Mending Wall"? Can these questions be used to develop a methodology that might be transferred from one piece of literature to another, from one course to another, from one group of students to another-- without sacrificing the teaching of critical reading skills? This essay will develop a strategy, based on reader-response criticism and Kenneth Burke's pentad, that teachers can apply to any literary work. The strategy will help students participate in a work's dramatic context, will help them discover meaning as they read, and will assure that their critical essays are based on an appreciation of the internal structures of a literary work.

## II
## Burke's Pentad

Kenneth Burke, in several seminal works, has developed a critical strategy that might well become a literature teacher's

5

most effective means of analyzing a complex literary work
before using it to teach students how to read a literary work.[2]
In outline, Burke's pentad is a simple concept. It suggests
that every communication process is dramatic, that in every act
of communication there ie an agent who acts through language,
there is an agency which enables the agent to act, there is a
scene or background against which the verbal action is taken,.
there is an action that can be abstracted from the overall
situation and represented as an event, and there is a purpose
which guides the developing verbal action from beginning to end.
Often these five elements, universal to every verbal situation,
have been reduced to the more familiar journalistic questione--
who, what, when, where, and why.[3] Such reductions, however,
are not capable of helping teachers introduce students to the
complex process of responding to literature simply because they
fail to account for the more complex rhetorical contexts that
are found in a literary work.

Literature, as James Moffett has argued in Teaching the
Universe of Discourse, is the most symbolic and abstract form
of discourse that any culture can produce.[4] When we read
literature we are interpreting concrete, dramatic experience
in abstract, symbolic terms. Denmark becomes a highly
abstracted symbol of corruption in Hamlet; Hartford,
Connecticut becomes a highly abstracted symbol of American
materialism in Connecticut Yankee; Ahab's quest for the whale
becomes a highly abstracted, almost emblematic symbol of human
ambition and pride in a neutral or malevolent universe in Moby
Dick. This move from concrete referent to abstract, dramatic
interpretive context seems natural enough to most experienced
readers of literature, English teachers included. But it is
most certainly a learned skill, something that beginners must
be taught, if we wish, as teachers, to expend our students'
experiential and conceptual backgrounis as they read.

Rhetorical criticism would explain literature's deceptively
abstract nature from a different perspective than Moffett's.
Any work of literature has, in essence, two rhetorical triads
within its context: the first constructed from the speaker,
subject, audience context in the work itself; the second con-
structed from the interaction of implied author, implied
reader, and implied or "real" subject. On the first level, for
example, "Mending Wall" is a poem told by a New England farmer,
addressed by implication to a reader who assumes interest in
the life represented in the poem (the rituals and functions of
farming in New England), and concerning the particular
activity of wall-mending. The interaction of dramatic com-
ponents of speaker, subject, and audience are indeed complex

6

8

on this level, but the reader of the poem can at least focus directly on dialogue, image, and action without worrying about ambiguities and ironies that evolve when focus is switched to the implied author's intention.

The second level of rhetorical interpretation is brought in once we consider what Robert Frost—pastoral and regional poet, master of dramatic irony—means to tell us through his rendering of the drama in this poem. Do we suppose an author who aligns himself with narrator, an enlightened spokesperson for progressive sharing of private property? Or do we search out a covert respect for the old stone savage, armed with fences against the "advances," the more communal thinking of the narrator? Does the assumed author find nature benign, neutral, or malevolent? Questions such as these could be asked of implied subject and readers as well. When readers ask these types of questions they are superimposing the more complex, implied rhetorical context of author, reader, and subject upon the simpler narrative-dramatic context within the poem itself.

### III
### Application of the Pentad to "Mending Wall"

How, then, can the pentad be applied to literary works by teachers who wish to introduce students to the complex inter- action between the surface and implied contexts of a literary work? The answer is simple enough, in theory. Teachers, must, first, analyze the work in order to find which of the five elements are most important and to pinpoint where each domi- nates the act of reading the poem. The following is the result of my application of the pentad to Robert Frost's "Mending Wall." Particularly in a complex work, keep in mind that two or more elements of the pentad may well operate at simultaneous textual moments. Also, it is important to remember that a reader arrives at a fuller understanding of dramatic context by considering the relationships (Burke calls them "ratios") among the elements of the pentad.

The first twenty-seven lines of the poem serve two dramatic functions: they establish the scene for the symbolic action that will follow—wall-mending; they define the agents—the actors—who will act in the rest of the poem. To understand the intricacies of symbolic action in this poem, however, we must examine these two elements—scene and agent—in more detail. Frost, in all his work, posits a rugged natural world, often bereft of human inhabitants, certainly incapable of pathetic fallacy, and representing isolated, lonely human beings.[5] Human action, in Frost, is usually seen against the

7

9

backdrop of nature's rugged insensitivity. A close look at lines 1-27, with this broader understanding in mind, reveals a complication in the process of defining central agents for the poem. The poem's narrator is, at first, apparently sole agent: he tells us about the wall; he tells us about what happens to the wall; he and his neighbors have found the "gaos" in the wall; he notifies his neighbor and instigates the wall-mending; he describes how he and his neighbor mend the wall; indeed, he is also the one who reduces this work to game and play by antagonizing his neighbor and by reminding him of the useless-ness of wall-mending. But a subterranean agent also acts through these twenty-seven lines--the "something" that destroys the wall, the human artifact ritualistically reconstructed every spring. It sometimes takes the form of "frozen-ground-swells," sometimes the form of hunters, sometimes the form of magic as it causes the stones to fall even as the neighbors mend. This opposition of human and natural agents creates a playful, agonistic context for the entire poem. We are watching a primal human game in which men work together to impose order on a potentially chaotic world. In fact, the culminating line of this first section explicitly labels wall-building "another kind of outdoor game."[6]

Scene also operates in two ways in these first twenty-seven lines. Lines 1-11 establish background for the action of wall-mending that will take place more specifically later in the poem: we see the New England terrain symbolized in "frozen-ground-swells" and "boulders in the sun"; we know the background of ritualized, seasonal behavior--the hunters, the "yelping dogs," the yearly evolution of "spring mending-time"-- that will serve as context for the wall-mending that takes place later. In lines 12-27, we are given the scenic fore-ground for the game: the narrator's ritual of notifying his neighbor; their ritual of line-walking; their "spelling" of the loaf-stones that fall from assigned places. These later come to function as the game's rules.

Lines 1-27 of the poem, then, create a complex interre-lationship of scene and agent. Experienced readers pick up all or at least some of this subconsciously. They, in a sense, feel the context that must be understood if the rest of the poem is to mean in a significant way. As teachers, then, it becomes our job to help students build this context, excuse the pun, from the "ground-swell" up. It is exactly at this point that I can clarify how Burke's pentad can help beginning readers. The elements of agent and scene become, with a first reading of lines 1-27 behind us, a means of shaping discussion and writing questions that will bring the subconscious bulk of the iceberg of literary context to the tip or surface of the beginning reader's attention.

IV
### A Burkean Heuristic for Discovering
### the Dramatic Context of "Mending Wall"

Secondary and college readers would certainly be able to follow the surface language and narrative action of "Mending Wall." The diction and syntax are common enough, and the imagery is familiar or, at least, easily compared with the student's experiences with rural life. Students would, however, need the teacher's help in coming to understand how the poem's language and structure take action against the reader, how these elements lead the reader toward and away from different perspectives on the poem's meaning.[7] Here is a set of directions, response-questions, and writing exercises that will help teachers bring students to an understanding of reading as an active process in which meaning evolves from give and take among perspectives.

1. Background: The teacher should pose questions about the title. Students might be asked to write a paragraph explaining what they think the poem will be about after reading only the title and discussing its implications. Does this sound like a poem about work? What are a reader's expectations when that question is answered affirmatively?

2. Before students read lines 1-12 of the poem they should be asked to look for two agents in competition with one another. The agents do not have to be human. After the twelve lines have been read, students should write two paragraphs describing the agents in the poem. Students should go back and gather evidence from the text to help make their definitions of agents clearer.

3. Students should read lines 12-27 with the idea of looking for a definition of setting or scene in the poem. After completing this reading, they should write a paragraph in which they generalize a definition of the scene in the poem, followed by a specific list of sensory elements, taken from the poem, that support the generalization. This is probably the time for a brief discussion of denotation and connotation, abstract and concrete, image and symbol, also drawing from words and images in the poem.

4. At this point, teachers should use terministic screens and perspectives by incongruity, two Burkean concepts, to shape a writing exercise that will ask students to look back, using their remarks on scene and agent, and forward

(a "perspective by incongruity") to the rest of the poem.[8]
When they play this Janus-headed critical role, looking
backward and forward in the poem almost simultaneously,
students will begin to develop a sense of what Burke
means by "terministic screens," the process by which a
fluent reader first adopts the writer's terminology. This
adopted terminology then is contrasted with, as reading
progresses, the reader's ways of putting similar ex-
periences and the poem's experience into words. Gradually,
the writer's and the reader's terminologies come together
to form a terminological screen through which the writer
and reader come to view what were different experiences
as one. These abstract terms, however, need not be taught
to students; they are theories that are helpful in de-
vising teaching strategies, such as the following:

> Describe in an introductory paragraph the "outdoor
> game" played by the narrator, the "old stone savage,"
> and nature in lines 28-45. Then, look back over your
> previous writings in response to sections one and two
> of the poem and explain the parts played by the scene
> (natural world) and the three agents (the narrator,
> the stone savage, and the undefined "magic" in nature)
> in the drama of the "outdoor game."[9]

This exercise ought to help students to objectify the
dramatic action, to accomplish what E. D. Hirsch, Jr.
would call the understanding of the inferred or "probable
meaning" of the poem.[10] In this case, meaning is not
simply paraphased; it is rendered in terms of the poem's
dramatic action—a perspective that will help beginning
readers of literature develop what Louise Rosenblatt class
an "aesthetic stance" as they read.[11] They will, in other
words, participate in the action represented in the poem
before they begin to make critical statements. Putting
participation before criticism ought to help teachers
avoid plot summaries and oversimplified, didactic state-
ments of meaning.

The last section of the poem (lines 28-45) refocuses the
reader's attention on different elements of the pentad. Where-
as lines 1-27 place emphasis on agents operating in a
particular scenic context, the last section of the poem puts
emphasis on agency (how the action is carried out) and action
(what actual event takes place). The game becomes the poet's
means of making a statement; the act of wall-building becomes
the poet's key symbol, his way of representing indirectly an
expository statement on the human condition in a world not
governed by any formative purpose—or, at least, not one dis-
coverable by man. The reader, to understand and appreciate

the poem, must construct a new level of meaning as he or she
responds to the "out door game," the narrator's question, and
the old-stone savage's ritual answer.

This new level of meaning, if reader-response criticism is
at all correct in its analyses of the literary reading process,
must be constructed from the results of readings of earlier
parts of the text. The fifth and last exercise in our sequence
of reading activities should, in consequence, lead the students
back to their earlier oral and written responses to lines 1-27
of the poem.

> 5. Read and discuss in workshop groups the last section
> of the poem (lines 28-45). Focus on the interaction
> between the narrator and the old stone savage. Why does
> the narrator `-k his baiting questions? What type of
> expression, what gestures—if any—does the old-stone
> savage portray as he answers? What tones of voice do both
> speakers use? What do you think the narrator is driving
> at? What does he wish to accomplish? Does he accomplish
> it? Who really has the last word? Once these questions
> have been discussed, students should take on the role of
> either the narrator or the old stone savage and answer
> these questions: As narrator, why do you feel that the
> maxim "good fences make good neighbors" should be
> questioned? What is the reasoning behind your question-
> ing? As the old-stone savage, explain the truth of "good
> fences make good neighbors." Use as much of the poem as
> you can to develop your answers.

This writing exercise should help students use the dramatic
interaction of outdoor game (agency) and wall-mending (action)
to re-experience the previously established tension among
agents in the poem. It should enable them to see beyond the
surface images of the poem to a deeper irony in which neither
the views of the narrator or the old-stone savage are dominant.

In most secondary and beginning college classrooms this
sequence of activities would, I believe, be sufficient. It
would teach the students to enter the dramatic context of a
literary work as participants; at the same time, it would help
them develop distance and objectivity, or what Kenneth Burke
calls "identification." Identification is a key concept
throughout Burke's rhetoric; it represents the reader's partial
sharing in and difference from the experience of the writer.[12]
"Mending Wall" demands dramatic participation and a degree of
critical-rational distance from its readers. Fluent readers
speculate and participate simultaneously, using literary con-
ventions and linguistic cues to direct their reaction to the

11

context of the poem itself, using—in turn—dramatic participation to keep their more abstract critical speculations under control.  The assignment sequence described ebove uses the act of writing to help students to participate and speculate, taking on increasingly more critical and abstract roles as they read.

υ

## Subjective and Objective Responses to "Mending Wall"

There are two alternatives available to teachers who would wish to take the response heuristic I have outlined here further up the ladder of abstraction.  In college classes, both should be pursued, one after the other.  In a secondary class, either one or the other could be managed with a relatively brief extension in time.

One alternative is subjective in nature.  I do not agree with David Bleich when he argues that, because all knowledge of literature has its roots in felt response, that, in turn, all literature pedagogy should begin with subjective responses.[13] Without doubt, subjective response must be incorporated in the reading process, but I believe it should be brought in <u>after</u> the students have been helped by teachers to partici,ate in the dramatic action of the poem itself—not as formal critics but as participants in the literary "event."  Moving in this direction from the activities I have already outlined would entail three general possibilities:

1.  having students recall, list, and connect with the poem past events that seem related to their reading of "Mending Wall";

2.  having. students record notes on feelings they had while first reading the poem—first, in shorthand while reading the poem, then in fuller form after having participated in the heuristics described above;

3.  having students go back over these two types of responses and compose an account of how their subjective reactions compared with their more objective first reactions to the dramatic context of the poem.

College teachers who might wish to build upon these earlier dramatic and subjective responses would bring the students to interpretations of authorial intention in the poem.[14] Many contemporary interpretations of this poem find irony in it, an irony in which the implied author is assumed to dismiss both the narrator's and the old-stone savage's

12

14

points of view. In this type of reading, the ambiguity and
tension inherent in the final lines of the poem between the
narrator's and savage's ways of seeing fences in reconciled
into the implied author's firm belief in the powers of ambiguity.
Men must work together or they work apart, as Frost often sug-
gested; the wisdom of "Mending Wall," this final reading
suggests, evolves from an author who dramatically juxtaposes
two divergent views of walls to construct a third view, a
synthesis of the others. Men need walls—and things like them—
to keep themselves together, to keep the spirit of community
intact, even when "He is all pine and I am apple orchard."
Without this sense of community, nature succeeds in forcing men
apart. What seems to keep men apart—walls, fences, work of
all kinds—actually keeps them together.

Bringing students to this more objective level of interpre-
tation would demand a reconstruction of the writings produced
in response to particular dramatic sequences as they were de-
fined in the first-stage dramatic activities, and it would
depend on incorporation of subjective reactions as they were
composed in the second-stage activities. Reconstructions of
this sort would also demand more outside information—on Frost's
work in general, on his biography, on general literary tech-
niques such as irony and point of view and their function in
literature in general.[15]


## VI
### What The Students Have Learned

Learning sequences such as those described above accom-
plish two general aims: they enable teachers to intervene in
the reading process in ways that will assure that students
"read" literature on an active, dramatic level before they
engage in more abstract interpretation; they also assure that
students develop habits of selection and prediction that are
consistent with the current psycholinguistic model of reading
when they read.[16]

Students will also have made specific gains in under-
standing "Mending Wall." First, they will have moved from what
might have been a simple acceptance of the narrator's
scepticism about walls in general to a more complex under-
standing of the tension between the narrator's and the old-
stone savage's views in the poem. Second, from a simple
acceptance of a didactic moral concerning "good fences make
good neighbors" the students will have moved to a more complex
realization of the place of ambiguity in developing a set of

13

moral beliefs—out of the tension between the narrator's and the old-stone savage's views comes a more complex synthesis of respect for and scepticism about the function of walls in human society. Third, students come to appreciate the complex relationship between the triad in the work and the triad of assumed author, reader, and subject that is implicit in all serious literature. They come to realize Frost's intentions, his use of a dramatically-realized game to render meaning symbolically. In the process, students involve themselves in a learning experience marked by what John Dewey described as "a sense of sharing in the consequences of what goes on" and, as a result, become more committed to learning as discovery than when they must simply reproduce information.[17]

## Notes

[1] Reader-response criticism and the learn-by-doing educational theory of cognitive psychologists who work from a post-Dewey model strive for similar goals. Both work within a broader context within which learning to read becomes part of the larger circle of learning in general. Both approaches put major emphasis on the _active_ participation of the reader-learner within the process of reading and learning. Frank Smith brings reading and general learning theory explicitly together in Understanding Reading, 2nd. ed. (New York: Holt, 1978). Wolfgang Iser succinctly summarizes the active participation of the reader in the making of literary meaning in his chapter on "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," The Implied Reader (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1974), pp. 274-294. James Moffett, in Teaching the Universe of Discourse, develops a learn-by-doing writing curriculum that progresses from concrete to abstract reading and writing, sequenced along a continuum that moves from personal narrative to public discourse (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1968). He applies Dewey's functional learning theory directly to reading and writing in the schools. See "John Dewey, "Experience in Thinking," Democracy and Education (New York: Free Press, MacMillan, 1966), pp. 139-151.

[2] For general discussion of the pentad see Language as Symbolic Action, Pt. I, pp. 1-97 and Chapter Seven, "A Dramatistic View of the Origins of Language and Postscripts on the Negative," pp. 419-479. The most thorough treatment of the pentad and the ratios among its components is presented in A Grammar of Motives (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945).

[3] An exception is William Irmscher's The Holt Guide to English, 2nd. ed. (New York: Holt, 1976), pp. 30-48. Irmscher provides sequences of complex questions on each element in the pentad; he suggests ways in which students might write "scenarios" that would use the pentad to dramatize particular writing topics; he suggests ways of exploring the negative aspects of each element; and he closes by relating the pentad to generating ideas for different types of discourse.

[4] Teaching the University of Discourse, pp. 50-53.

[5] John Lynen, in "Frost as Modern Poet," argues that Frost's pastoral-rural imagery and language become his means of

imposing order on the modern, urban, and morally chaotic world
(in Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays, ed. by
James M. Cox, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1962, p. 185). This
order, rather than an essential component in nature, is
actually entirely linguistic; it is imposed by Frost's nar-
rators on situations that are in themselves often terrifyingly
disordered, at least to human perception. Yvor Winters recog-
nizes this fact in "Robert Frost: or the Spiritual Drifter
as Poet," Robert Frost: A Collection of Critical Essays, p.
63. Winters, however, does not take Frost's representation of
an amoral or even malevolent natural world as an ontological
assertion; he sees it, in contrast, as an essential lack of
courage, the poet's inability to make definite moral choices.

[6] This and subsequent references to "Mending Wall" are
taken from X. J. Kennedy's reprinting of the poem in
Literature: An Introduction to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama,
2nd. ed. (Boston: Little-Brown, 1979), p. 750.

[7] Wolfgang Iser discusses the problem of multiple and
shifting perspectives in the act of reading literature in
The Act of Reading (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1978). See
particularly his discussion of "theme and horizon" (p. 96 ff.),
where he argues that previously read events become the back-
ground or "horizon" to the reader's focus on theme at any
given moment in the reading process.

[8] The premises behind the terministic-screen concept are
scattered throughout Burke's work. In Attitudes Toward History
(Los Altos, California: Hermes Publications, 1959), p. 260 ff,
Burke takes the "heads I win, tails you lose" mode of
dichtomous thought then prevalent in the behavioral and
positivistic sciences and uses it as the basis for a dialectic
that transcends dichotomous thinking through the opposition and
ultimate synthesis of the writer's and reader's terministic
screens. In "Our Attempt to Avoid Mere Relativism," Language
As Symbolic Action, pp. 52-62, Burke defines terministic
screens as chunks of language that direct the reader's atten-
tion to a pattern of symbols or terms within the larger field
of discourse that is represented by the whole text. The
writer's particular structuring of terms becomes the reader's
new perspective on a field of experience. Perspectives that
are drawn from the writer's terminology are then placed beside
the reader's previously composed terms for the experience. The
result is a more complex and synthesized "perspective by
incongruity."

[9] In a recent College Composition and Communication article, "A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," Linda Flower and John R. Hayes point out in detail how successful writers use successively written notes and drafts as means of discovering and reshaping what their primary goals are as they write (XXXII, Dec. 1981, 365-387). This idea of using writing to revise and reshape what is being written is the same type of thing I am asking for as students respond to a literary work. In responding to literature, however, the student must shape overall goals that outline different types of response and participation within the work as it unfolds its meaning at various levels.

[10] This is a paraphrase, not a direct quotation. Meaning, Hirsch argues, derives from the reader's understanding of the implied or "intrinsic genre" of a work, which is created by the author's careful placement of literary cues, conventions, and techniques within a specific dramatic context. See, especially, Validity in Interpretation, Chapter Three, "The Concept of Genres" (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 68-126.

[11] The Reader, The Text, and the Poem (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), pp. 27.

[12] The most condensed discussion of rhetorical "identification" appears on pp. 19-37 of Burke's A Rhetoric of Motives (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969).

[13] "...we are...reminded that the essence of a symbolic work is not in its visible sensory structure or in its manifest semantic load but in its subjective re-creation by a reader...." Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism (Urbana, Illinois: NCTE, 1975), p. 21.

[14] Frost, in his playfully enigmatic way, consistently denied the literary or political intentions that were often attributed to this poem by general readers and critics. The best known of these denials came about when Frost visited Moscow in August, 1962, as reported in Lawrance Thompson and R. H. Winnick's Robert Frost: The Later Years, 1938-1963 (New York: Holt, 1976), p. 316. In the midst of a series of readings to small private audiences Frost read "Mending Wall" to a group in Moscow. As Thompson and Winnick put it, "with the issue of Berlin still far from resolved, and with the wall the East Germans had erected in 1961 still drawing widespread criticism in the west, Frost's choice of this particular poem

17

seemed inescapably political to many ...." But Frost per-
sistently denied any political intent, and went on to add that
he had had "lots of adventures with that poem .... People
are frequently misunderstanding it or misinterpreting it. The
secret of what it means I keep." In a letter to Leonidas W.
Payne, Jr., Frost responded to a query on the meaning of
"Mending Wall" with the remark that "I should be sorry if a
single one of my poems stopped with either of those things
[atmosphere and character]--stopped anywhere in fact. My
poems--I should suppose everybody's poems--are all set to trip
the reader head foremost into the boundless." Selected Letters
of Robert Frost, ed. by Lawrance Thompson (New York: Holt,
1964), p. 344. In both contexts, Frost seems to align himself
with Iser's contention that the meaning of a poem is potentially
infinite, never fully exhausted, and that to stop at any
particular level is to impoverish the concept of "literary
meaning" in its own right. Frank Lentricchia, of all the
critics of "Mending Wall," best describes Frost's emphasis on
shared process rather than didactic meaning when he argues that
"It is a poem that celebrates a process, not the thing itself....
The narrator ... is not committed to ends, but to the process
itself which he sees as having nonutilatarian value." The
reader, Lentricchia suggests, must also share in the narrator's
savoring of the experience itself, its playful delight by taking
on and trying out different perspectives on the drama, always
balancing perspectives until a third perspective is synthe-
sized from them. Robert Frost: Modern Poetics and the
Landscape of Self (Durham: Duke University Press, 1975), p.
106.

[15] Readers, in other words, would have to possess various
levels and kinds of information drawn from outside the poem's
text itself in order to progress from their dramatic partici-
pation in the poem's meaning to what E. D. Hirsch, Jr. would
call the "significance" of the experienced meaning. See
Validity in Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press,
1967), p. 63.

[16] This model is succinctly summarized in Charles R. Cooper
and Anthony R. Petrosky, "A Psycholinguistic View of the Fluent
Reading Process," Journal of Reading (December 1976), 184-207.

[17] Democracy and Education, p. 147.

# HOW DID YOU LIKE IT? THE QUESTION OF STUDENT RESPONSE AND LITERATURE

Charles R. Duke, Murray State University

How many times have we walked into our classrooms and said to students, "Well, how did you like the story you read for today?" And what has happened. Did students answer quickly and eagerly or did they just sit there—waiting. Most of us probably do not expect a response, but we keep tossing out the question from force of habit and a forlorn hope that some one, some time, somewhere, will respond.

As English teachers we have been trained, even possibly overtrained, to think of reading as an analytical act, one which calls for delving into the various aspects of a work (the period in which it was written, the life of the author, the style of the writing) to determine the work's meaning. Then, perhaps, we transfer our discoveries into the form of a critical essay. Although there is nothing fundamentally wrong with such activity—after all, it brought those of us who are voracious readers of literature to this point in our careers—it may not be the most appropriate route for many of the students with whom we meet daily.

For most of our students, reading is not a major concern in their world. If reading is important, it's for determining what movie is playing, how the local or national sports teams are doing, or perhaps what important people, especially in the entertainment field, are doing. There may exist a thirst for basic information related to cars, fashions, stereo equipment, computers or other hobbies or interests. But the key to whatever reading is done on a voluntary basis by students is that it provides them with information for aspects of their lives which they believe to be important. To many students, their personal lives seem quite unrelated to the majority of

19

selections that appear in the classroom literature anthology,
even though we may have made attempts to select pieces we
believe should come close to matching their needs and interests.

One of the basic tenets about reading, which has become
obscured, however, is that all readers, no matter how
sophisticated, begin their response to what they read on the
basis of a subjective reaction to the experience of the text.
Louise Rosenblatt in The Reader, The Text, and The Poem
(Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978) sug-
gests that there are two types of reading response, the
efferent, or non-literary reading, and the aesthetic, or
literary reading.

> In nonaesthetic reading, the reader's attention is
> focused primarily on what will remain as residue
> after the reading—the information to be acquired,
> the logical solution to a problem, the actions to
> be carried out....  In aesthetic (literary) reading,
> in contrast, the reader's primary concern is what
> happens during the actual reading event......  'In
> aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered
> directly on what he is living through during his
> relationship with that particular text.  (pp. 23
> and 24-25)

We tend to emphasize the nonaesthetic reading in our
classrooms by giving students the impression that instant re-
call is most important; therefore, discussion of a reading as-
signment becomes more like an inquisition with the prosecutor—
the teacher—firing questions at the defendants—the students—
who, in turn, afraid they will incriminate themselves, refuse
to answer.  The sad part about this distortion of the response
to reading is that both students and adults know that what
happens most frequently in the classroom is not what happens
outside.  Given the ability to read—and most of us have that
without question—we have learned unconsciously to read
aesthetically.  Whether we learned this from watching tele-
vision, going to movies, listening to people tell stories or
from being read to, we have acquired the ability to enter a
piece of literature as an experience in its own right.  If we
doubt this, we should check in the backpockets of adol scents
or in their pocketbooks; far more often than we might expect,
there will be a paperback there.  Even students who have
difficulty reading school texts for information can read
fiction; it may not be Hawthorne or Melville—more likely it
will be gothic fiction for the girls and science fiction for

the boys—but, ironically, the selections were made on their
potential more for the aesthetic experience than for the
efferent one.[1]

Because this dichotomy exists, we need to become more
aware of how to put students back in touch with the aesthetic
role of reading done for the classroom. We do not need to drop
entirely the nonliterary aspects of classroom talk and response,
but since our response as readers is essentially aesthetic in
the first reading, that is where we should concentrate our
efforts for bringing the two types of response into sharper
focus.

One of the exciting aspects of reading often overlooked by
students, as well as many adults, is that once we complete the
"reading" of a text, we are not necessarily finished with it,
any more than we may be finished with an experience that occurs
in our lives. Often we turn that experience around and around
in our minds, seeking new angles on it, replaying certain parts
to see how the roles might be changed. In other words, if some-
thing interests us or affects us in some way, we are quite free
to reflect, reconstruct, and interpret, and in the process come
to a better understanding of what might not have been as clear
in the beginning. Therefore, reading should be first a con-
versation between text and reader in which the reader asks
questions of his or her own design and seeks answers and makes
comments.

How, then, do we go about developing student response to
literature which stresses the reader's involvement with the
text and the reactions to that involvement. David Bleich in
Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism
(Urbana: NCTE, 1975) suggests that we capitalize on "two basic
components which contribute to any individual's emotional
response to anything--affect and association."

Affect may be described as the "gut reaction" we experi-
ence when our raw emotions are touched: anger, jealousy, envy,
contentment; it also tends to be what people mention when asked
how they are feeling about something--"I cried during that
movie" or "I really felt sad when the father went away."
Teachers will quickly recognize this level of response in
student comments such as "I hated this story" or "I liked the
story okay I guess." Students making such responses usually do
not follow with any specific explanation; in fact, conversations
seem to terminate quickly after statements of affect have been
made. But it is this first level of response that must be
acknowledged, even encouraged, before we can move to the second,
that of association. Student readers need to have the

21

opportunity to register their emotional reactions to reading. Implicit, then, in our question of "How did you like it" is an invitation to respond on the affective level. However, students have learned that if they do rise to that bait, frequently an inquisition follows in which the teacher tries to pinpoint the reaction, and almost always this search serves not as an exploration of the student's feelings or the sources of those feelings, but simply as a check of whether or not the student read the story.

Still, to actually understand affective responses, we need to have an understanding of what prompted them. A student who says, "That story made me feel good" or "I really understood how the character felt right then" provides only a hint. Beneath the surface response, memories and reflection lie which fed the response and those associations are what makea the reading an aesthetic experience. Most often these associations are in the form of "stories" or anecdotes, and it is these anecdotal associations, or "analogies" as Bleich calls them, which can form the basis for real understanding of students' response to various pieces of literature. Once again, however, these associations are not rendered willingly by most students because that calls for sharing a bit of themselves. Few of us are ready to volunteer explanations of our feelings when in a group of people who are, for the most part, strangers. Of course, we are not talking here about simply telling everything or anything—a condition which sometimes occurs in the early grades' sessions of show and tell. There's a discipline in subjective response that comes from trying to explain the association between text, reader and response clearly.

Because many students bring so much unnecessary literary baggage with them, trying to engage students directly in personal responses to literature tends not to work well. Instead, students need a variety of non-threatening opportunities to ease into this perspective. One possible approach may lie in what James Britton and others[2] have come to call the "expressive mode" of discourse—the kind of writing which comes directly from the writer's experience into words and which assumes a direct concern with the writer, rather than with some other purpose. The joining of reading and writing as a part of subjective response, therefore, seems quite logical. We must remember, though, that the forms and modes of expressive discourse are rooted, as the reader/writer's emotions are, in the response to an experience rather than in imitation or recreation of forms discovered by objective analysis.

All of us have been in the classroom long enough to realize that students will not perceive readily the connection between reading and writing nor will they necessarily respond

honestly at first when invited to do so. For this reason, they
may need some prompts and ample opportunity to practice. Per-
haps the easiest way to introduce students to this way of
responding is through the keeping of a reading process journal.
If entries in this journal are handled not as finished pieces
of writing to be graded but merely as explorations and attempts
to get closer to what happens during and after the reading, the
entries will provide useful information about the progress
students are making in dealing with their subjective responses
to reading.

The following categories and questions suggest some of the
possible prompts that might be used with students.[3]

### Memory

When we finish reading a piece of literature, quite often
we discover that particular thoughts flash through our
minds, such as "I can't believe that old man reminded
me so much of my grandfather." Explore such connections
between the text and your memories--what are the
similarities or differences? Can you focus, perhaps,
on one incident or anecdote that seems to explain the
connections?

### Belief

Most of us have strong opinions or beliefs about the
number of things in our lives. Perhaps it is hard to
put those beliefs into words without their sounding a
bit like slogans: prejudice destroys people, adults
don't understand teenagers, etc. But if you found some
of your beliefs surfacing as you read, talk about them--
What prompted them to surface? Where did those beliefs
originate? How did those beliefs affect your response
to the story? To what extent do you find your own
life reflecting those beliefs?

### Feelings

Reading tends to be an emotional experience if we get
involved with literature at all. Some pieces of litera-
ture, of course, engage us more deeply than others.
A key statement, action, word, or idea can cause a strong
emotion in us--a feeling of anger, sadness, or pleasure
perhaps. What is it in this work which prompted strong
emotion or even, possibly, a lack of feeling? Why does
it affect you this way? Does such an emotional response
surprise you or not?

Sharing

Suppose you read a piece of literature and there's no one
around to share it with?  How do you feel?  If people
were available, what would you want to say about the
piece?  What would be going on in your mind before you
spoke about your reading?  To what extent would past
experience in talking about literature shape your oral
response?  What happens when you talk about your reading
that affects your recall of the reading experience?

Meaning

To what extent do you discover meaning already in a piece
of literature?  To what extent do you think you place
meaning in what you read?  How would you describe this
latter process if it occurs?  Where does your "meaning"
come from?

In practice, the journal entries take many directions,
often blending emotion and analysis, a combination, of course,
that we are pleased to see.  For instance, in one class
students were asked to read the "Introduction" to Studs
Terkel's <u>Working</u> (New York:  Random House, 1974) and then
"free write" on the subject of work.  During the next class
they were asked to write their interpretation of the
"Introduction" itself and then a third journal assignment asked
them to compare the previous two entries.  Here are one stu-
dent's responses, including a fourth unassigned journal
response.[4]

#1.  Work!  ....Why are we so geared to money in our
society?  Almost everyone works out of necessity and
not many people like their jobs.  I don't think
Americans are so decadent, but it leaves me with the
question that maybe there is an alternate method of
happiness and survival...without so much emphasis put
on work.  Work has different meanings...A construction
worker doesn't think of a bank teller as a working
man or woman.

#2.  The essay "Introduction" is probably a true
feeling among workers in America today...but I was
disturbed by the sense of pessimism....  Using a topic
like "What's Wrong with America" and letting Mr. Terkel
write it, you would think he studied under H. L. Mencken,
of that I have no doubt.  I wonder if Mr. Terkel would
be as...explicit and adamant if he (did) some work on

what's good and right with America?  Sardonic, acerbic
words and writing usually tell us what we already know
and will admit....  Too often the creators of these
works never give us any solutions to the problems...
I seem to have gotten off on a tangent I really didn't
mean to...

#3.  When completing the free-writing assignment last
Friday about Work I felt, after reading the essay by
Studs Terkel, that a lot of the people he wrote about
felt like me.  Necessity is the primary reason people
work.  Those who find fulfillment and satisfaction in
their jobs are extremely fortunate as the majority of
working people don't.  I mentioned the emphasis put on
work and a different view is held today.  Monotony has
always been a problem in the working sector and I was
reminded of some of my jobs by the switchboard operator
and the gas meter reader he used as illustrations.
I firmly believe the people of this country would like
to see an alternate or modified plan.

#4.  I watched the television musical version of Studs
Terkel's working people.  Since I had read the
Introduction to Working, I could understand the people....
When I first read it I formed the wrong opinion of
Terkel and his purpose.  I realize now he didn't intend
to be vitriolic.  I never should have compared him to
H. L. Mencken.

After students have kept their journals for a time, they
may be encouraged to review their entries and perhaps select
one or several entries which they are willing to "flesh out"
into fuller pieces of written discourse.  Such pieces, called
for once or twice during a term, could be treated as regular
writing assignments and evaluated in much the same way as other
finished papers.  Students will vary greatly in what they
choose to write about in these papers.  Some students focus on
one story and their reactions to it, refining their journal
entries until a definite connection or focus emerges that, to
them, reveals something important about their personal response
as readers.  Others will choose to select several entries on
several works and attempt to show how their reading process
seems to vary or remain the same from one piece of literature
to another.  Still others will become interested in tracing
their emergence as readers who are willing to talk more
directly and subjectively about their responses to reading.

In the embryo stages of journal writing, the teacher must
be certain to respect the entries. Occasionally picking up the
journals and responding only as another reader, not as a critic,
helps. Such response lets students know that ultimately their
reactions can be shared and that the audience for them will be
thoughtful and non-evaluative. Many teachers find it helpful
also to share entries from their own reading journals with
students, letting them see the same process going on with the
adult reader.

The journals can also serve as a catalyst for open dialogue
in the classroom. Patience becomes a real virtue in attempting
to help students become comfortable enough to carry on conver-
sations in the classroom where everyone hears the personal
reaction that previously might only have been expressed in a
journal. As teachers, we like to believe that we have been
encouraging personal response in class, but transcriptions of
numerous classroom discussions about literature usually show
that the "conversation" is actually a monologue, punctuated on
occasion with Socratic dialogue. So, we have work to do here
if personal response is going to be valued at all in the class-
room as a valid part of the reading experience. One of the
best ways to do this is to model conversations with students,
beginning with some individuals who are comfortable talking in
class. Directions for such open conversations are simple, and
can be offered to students in the following form:

1. We're having a conversation, not a lecture; that
means at least two people have to be involved. In the
conversation, we're responding to each other's responses
to the reading, not testing each other.

2. Anyone may refuse to answer a question if it seems
too personal or if it seems unanswerable; we can do this
by telling the questioner, "I'd rather not discuss that
right now."

3. Anyone in the conversation may ask a question.

4. Anyone participating in the conversation may end it
at any time.

Admittedly, such conversations take time and preparation
on the part of both students and teachers. As strongly
conditioned as they are to listen and not to respond, much less
question, students will find the initial conversations diffi-
cult and awkward; teachers, too, will undergo some discomfort
and a concern about how productive the first attempts are.

Journal responses can serve as starting points for the con-
versations. Discussing what happened in trial conversations
will help--even listening to taped playbacks of dialogues--to
determine the key elements for a good conversation. The
following observations may prove useful in developing a model
and may also provide guidelines for students who should,
eventually, de    ˒ their own "conversations" with peers.[5]

A. Getting Started--the beginning of s conversation
should be open-ended; for example, "What part of the
story seems to stick in your mind?" or "If you were
going to come back to this story in three or four
weeks, what do you think you will remember about it?"

B. Focusing the Conversation--the talk focuses on what
the readers have to say about themselves and their
experience with the text now that they have had time
to reflect. For instance, one speaker might comment
on the number of household duties a character in the
story seemed responsible for; the other speaker might
respond; "You seem to feel the mother had a number of
duties--how does that compare with the number of
chores your mother had to do?"

C. Keeping the Conversation Going--if responses are
fragmented or vague, simple restatement of the responses
or a clarification requested from the text itself may
be all that's necessary to develop the content of the
talk; as responses become fuller and clearer, summaries
of each other's reaponses will be helpful and requests
for more detail, additional examples, and verification
will become natural.

D. Disagreeing--no speaker should be hesitant about
offering contrasting interpretations. Such interpre-
tations, though, should be offered as personal response,
not as final statements of fact. Differences can lead
to interesting discussions if we remember 'o respect
each other's personal response. Asking the other
person to suggest areas of the text which prompted the
contrasting interpretation will be helpful as will
indicating what part of the response is purely personal
and what parts are directly related to the text.

E. Ending the Conversations--as the discussion draws
to a close each speaker should attempt to make some
judgments about what was heard. These judgments can
be reflected in attempts to summarize the other person's

27

views. All conversations should end with a sense that everyone was heard and everyone received response.

Organizing classroom study of literature to include personal response as the first step toward greater understanding and appreciation of literature and the role of reading in a person's life is not easy. But in many respects we as teachers share the same kind of problems that students do when they come to us. For example, Louise Rosenblatt, in the following passage, might just as well be describing teachers:

Year after year as freshmen come into college, one finds that even the most verbally proficient of them, often those most intimately drawn to literature, have already acquired a hard veneer, a pseudo-professional approach. They are anxious to have the correct labels—the right period, the biographical background, the correct evaluation. They read literary histories and biographies, critical essays, and then, if they have the time, they read the works.[6]

Together, teachers and students need to remove the veneer that covers many of their classroom responses to literature and discover the real substance beneath, that of the centrality of the reader's personal response to the total experience of reading.

## Notes

[1]See Charles R. Duke, "The Case of the Divorced Reader," *English Journal* (February 1977), pp. 33-36.

[2]See James Britton and others. *The Development of Writing Abilities* (11-18). London: Schools Council Publication, 1975.

[3]Adapted from Michael Piper and Joseph Comprone, "Literature and Composition," *Kentucky English Bulletin* (Fall 1981) and David Bleich, *Readings and Feelings, An Introduction to Subjective Criticism* (NCTE, 1975), pp. 101-105.

[4]Taken from unpublished student journal, at Paducah Community College, Paducah, Kentucky.

[5]Adapted from Agnes J. Webb, "Transactions with Literary Texts: Conversations in Classrooms," *English Journal* (March 1982), pp. 56-70; see also Robert E. Probst, "Response-Based Teaching of Literature," *English Journal* (November 1981), pp. 43-47.

[6]"Acid Test in Teaching Literature," *English Journal* (February 1956), p. 71.

31

# ELICITING RESPONSE TO LITERATURE

Joan W. Groham, Hapeville High School, Hapeville,
  Georgia, and
Robert E. Probst, Georgia State University

> The central justification for literature is that
> it is an open source for self-realization and
> fulfillment by the reader....
>
> Mario Valdes[1]

## The Situation

Walking into a classroom to confront thirty blank faces,
armed with a tattered copy of <u>Adventures in Reading</u>, loins
girded with lists of behavioral objectives from the curriculum
guide, comforted and inspired by memories of a favorite English
professor, a teacher may be forgiven his or her fear and
trembling.  Self-realization and fulfillment may have lured him
or her into literary studies in the first place, but the stu-
dents don't seem eager for it, the objectives say nothing about
it, and the textbook's selections may not seem so open a source
as Valdes suggests.

In such circumstances, it isn't surprising that a teacher
may fall back upon the security of the behavioral objectives.
They are, after all, something to do—they make the long day
seem somehow predictable, manageable.  They offer activities,
work, busyness.  They will fill the hours.

Nor is it surprising if the teacher takes refuge in the
order and logic of the text.  It does proceed in an orderly
fashion, moving, in the historically arranged courses of the
upper grades, from <u>Beowulf</u> to Virginia Wolfe, from year to year,
in a manner comprehensible to anyone who can count from 1 to
1990.  In the lower grades, the text may find its organizing

principles in genre study, providing, again, a plan comprehensible to anyone who can tell the difference between big and little. The differences, after all, between short story and novel are so simple--one is longer than the other--that they can be taught effectively in a few minutes, or so complex and subtle that a student must write stories and novels to understand them.[2]

Still less is it surprising if the teacher falls back upon the approaches and techniques of a remembered professor, whose brilliant lectures, wealth of knowledge, depth of understanding, and--most of all--grandeur of stature before the class, awed students into submission and complacence. That professor, quite likely a New Critic of sorts, had standards and strategies.

Unfortunately, those behavioral objectives, concrete, specific, and measurable as they are, are also probably silly, meaningless, trivial, and usually unintelligible. They are the bits and pieces of intellectual activity, fragmented and disassembled, uninformed by any significant vision of the purposes and possibilities of literature study. Unfortunately, too, the organizational principles derived from genre study and from literary history aren't appropriate in the secondary schools. Few of those thirty faces will brighten at the prospects of comparing the Petrarchan and Shakespearean sonnets, of learning the characteristics of the modern short story, of tracing literary influences through the seventeenth century. Genre study and literary history are not among the natural interests of the typical adolescent. And most unfortunate of all, the New Critical professor, awesome as he or she may have been, exemplifies a vision of literature and pedagogy that is not well-received by many secondary school students. Scholes describes that professor's work:

> In the name of improved interpretation, reading was turned into a mystery and the literature classroom into a chapel where the priestly instructor... astounded the faithful with miracles of interpretation.[3]

Few faces are brightened these days by miracles of interpretation.

And even if they were, it wouldn't be appropriate for the secondary English classroom to devote itself to astounding the masses. It would be a far more significant accomplishment to teach students to profit from literature as Valdes suggests they might.

31

## The Possibilities

Changes in critical perspective:

During the past several decades, New Critical theory has begun to lose its vitality, and it has been challenged by other conceptions of literature and the act of reading.[4] Louise Rosenblatt, David Bleich, Wolfgang Iser, and others have begun to develop elaborate and convincing philosophical justifications for an approach that has come to be known as reader-response criticism. Suzanne Howell, Charles Duke, and others concerned with the secondary schools have begun to experiment with the implications of their theories in the English class. Reader-response criticism, and thus much of response-based teaching of literature, is predicated upon the vision of literature and of reading expressed succinctly by Iser:

> A literary text must therefore be conceived in such
> a way that it will engage the reader's imagination
> in the task of working things out for himself, for
> reading is only a pleasure when it is active and
> creative.[5]

Thus reflective reading begins with the expression and discussion of initial reactions to the work. If the students' imaginations are to be engaged, if they are to work things out for themselves, to begin elsewhere is pointless. Their responses—emotional, intellectual, or visceral; primitive or sophisticated; perceptive or confused—are the substance upon which their imaginations can best work. To expect students, too early, to be interested in the author, the genre, the period, the body of critical commentary, is to distract them from the contact with the work that they might naturally achieve. Those interests—in the data about the literature—might arise later, in the course of discussion of the works, and if they do it is of course appropriate to pursue them, but they are unlikely to be the starting point for most students. Rather, the first question is "Does the boy get the girl or not?"

And the second, and more important question for the critic and teacher who conceive of the literary work as Iser suggests, is, "What do I make of this?" That is, what does the work say to me? How do I see it? Does it offer perceptions and insights that I find valuable? Such questions are more natural and interesting to students, perhaps because they focus so clearly upon them. They ask students to consider their visions and perceptions, to examine and clarify them, rather than simply to absorb the visions and perceptions of someone else. To begin here is not to invite the student to become

32

34

self-indulgent and lazy and anti-intellectual. Duckworth, who
has studied the nature of learning, would argue that, on the
contrary, such teaching is most likely to contribute to the
student's cognitive growth:

> ...teachers can assist this growth primarily by
> accepting the child's perspective as the legitimate
> framework for generating ideas--allowing the child
> to work out her or his own questions and answers.[6]

Her statement is almost an echo of Iser's.

Implied patterns for the literature classroom:

The teacher of literature who agrees with Iser and
Duckworth would not demand that the student's first responses
be intellectual, reasoned statements, or even that they be
fully articulated. Instead, he or she would welcome tentative,
halting, probing comments, partially formulated statements about
self or work, and encourage students to look upon such state-
ments as the raw material from which clearer conceptions and
judgments might be made. He or she might begin with the
vaguest, most amorphous, non-directive question possible, some-
thing analagous to a shrug of the shoulders or a "Well, what
do you make of this?" If students respond, if they have some
perception or response to offer, then the class is under way.
The ensuing discussion is a delicate process, requiring the
teacher to react quickly, but it is not limited to meandering
and lazy gropings after unfounded opinions. Rather, subsequent
questions can explore the students' reactions, seeking out the
differences and similarities among them, clarifying them,
searching for their points of origin in the text and in the
students' experiences. The pattern reflects Piaget's in-
sistence that one goal of education must be to get "children
to check their ideas and not to accept as valid the first
thought that comes to mind."[7]

Such teaching clearly demands a comfortable classroom, with
a reasonable level of trust. Neither teacher nor students
should fear making mistakes or expressing ideas that they may
later wish to retract. Everyone must be reasonably free from
the damaging obsession for correctness with which many schools
so carefully and methodically infect their victims. Students
must, as Elkind puts it, be invited "to check their ideas
without the onus of right and wrong, particularly when the
alternative idea is presented tentatively,"[8] as, of course, it
must be in the sort of probing, tentative discussion that is

33

intended to build upon and reshape first impressions and reactions.

The tone in the classroom must encourage cooperation if students are to feel comfortable offering their tentative and untried observations and responses. They must therefore be encouraged to respect and accept the contributions of others. At times those contributions may seem digressive and irrelevant. At times they will be conscious efforts to distract and confuse. But if the potential of the group is respected, ultimately, many of the students may come to recognize that they have much to learn from one another. Erikson points out that it is largely in the peer group that questions of importance to the adolescent are tackled, perhaps because part of the adolescent identity crisis is a struggle against adult direction and control. By establishing a forum for exchanging opinions, experiences, reactions, and judgments, response-based teaching provides an opportunity for students to deal with the significant events presented in the literature, which are, if the literature is well-selected, the significant events of human life, under the gentle guidance of someone presumable more experienced in both life and literature.

Basing literature instruction on the reader's responses is not intended to transform the classroom into an emotional, anti-intellectual experience, nor does it deny the validity of interest in literary history or biography, in close analytical reading, or in any of the other practiced approaches to literary studies. It does, however, reflect two assumptions possibly not shared by those who emphasize some of the other, perhaps more traditional approaches. The first of these is the belief that there is a natural human interest in understanding one's own responses to the world in general and to a literary work in particular. It is natural and human to want to comprehend oneself and one's friends, and one's world. The literary work may be one avenue to that understanding.

The second is the belief that meaning is made, not found, and that it is made by bringing prior experience, unique and individual as it may be, together with current experience, observing the meeting with the greatest intellectual rigor possible.

## The Practice

Despite the increasing attention to response-based teaching in the journals, however, many teachers have been reluctant to experiment with it, perhaps because it seems to

offer a less concrete and manageable pedagogy than that of New Criticism or of the typical textbook and curriculum guide. To emphasize student response, unreliable and unpredictable as it might be, seems to invite chaos. These new or revived visions of literature do suggest, however, some workable strategies that have begun to prove themselves effective and enjoyable for secondary school students.

The brief written response:

Consider, for instance, strategies implicit in Iser's conception of the literary work. He suggests that the literary work must be allowed to "engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself." If the teacher is to invite his students to do that, then he or she must begin by asking them to formulate some impressions of those things they are to work out. In other words, the teacher needs to provide some time for the students to decide what their own perceptions, reactions, and questions are.

In an effort to do that, the teacher might simply ask students to take five to ten minutes, after reading the selection, to write down their reactions. It would be helpful, but not necessary, for the students to have had some previous experience with free and forced writing,[9] before applying it in the context of a literature lesson, so that they would feel more comfortable with the request that they write without stopping for several minutes. The task is simple--the teacher asks them, as soon as they have finished reading, to write whatever comes to mind, without censoring, without trying to be academic, without worrying about the correctness of either the perceptions recorded or the language in which it is recorded.

It may take some persuading to convince students that they are free to write what and how they wish in this activity, but for them to try to predict what the teacher might want, or to try to spell everything correctly and punctuate properly, would be to destroy the activity. The point, of which they must be convinced, is to identify what they see in the work, how they feel about it, what they think of it. Those thoughts and feelings are the substance out of which their understanding of the literature will be built.

The writing time should allow ideas to crystallize, some questions to arise, and some judgments to be formed--the teacher may expect those thoughts to support the discussion. Because they are asked to write first, with no preceding discussion, students will have to fall back upon their own resources. It is virtually inevitable that what they have to

35

say will reflect their own perceptions, their own interests.
Except insofar as they have learned to mimic the voice and
style and focus of teachers and critics, they will have nothing
but their own impressions and responses to record. They will
have been denied the easy response, "I think what he said."
Their brief writings will thus provide a beginning point that
lies equally in the literary work and in themselves, and the
discussion that follows is consequently more likely to engage
the readers' imagination, and to involve them in the active and
creative reading that Iser hopes for.

The brief statements produced by the free-writing may then
serve as the basis of discussion, which may be handled in any
of several ways. One way is simply to begin, without further
mention of the writing, by asking the students for their com-
ments. It is likely that many of the students, because they
have been given the time for thought, and the demand that they
write, which forces them to capture the thoughts in words, will
have something to say. It is also likely—or rather,
inevitable—that, in a group of thirty or forty, different
things will be said. They are different people, and they will
have different backgrounds, attitudes, insights—the single
work will not strike all of its readers in a single way.

The differences in response should often be enough to
provoke interest, even with very little prodding from the
teacher. When one student sees Macbeth as evil and corrupt and
guilty, and another sees him as pitiably weak and manipulable
and guiltless, they have reason to talk with one another. When
one student condemns the brutality in "The New Kid" and another
condones it, then again there is an issue to explore further.
The juxtaposition of differing responses will fuel the talk.
Out of those differing responses, a discussion that takes into
consideration both the text and the uniqueness of the reader
may grow.

A second strategy makes more overt use of the writings.
Rather than simply depend upon them to force the crystallizing
of ideas, they may be directly addressed by asking students
to read their brief commentaries aloud, inviting observations
and discussion after each. When several have been read, it is
likely that some points of disagreement will have emerged, and
again the discussion should be under way. It would not be
appropriate to make the reading mechanical—the class need not
be subjected to thirty recitations. Rather, enough of the
papers should be read to fire the talk. When the discussion
begins to flag, then it may be time to look at several more.

If students are shy about reading their comments, the
teacher might prefer to collect them and flip through them,

reading aloud at random, or perhaps quickly selecting papers
that seem likely to be provocative, until discussion has been
stimulated. If the randomness of that approach disturbs the
students, then the teacher might, alone, with the assistance of
a small group, or in consultation with the whole class, identify
the major issues raised in the collection of papers, and build
from them an agenda for the class, allocating time for each
question.

Perhaps one of the most effective ways of using the brief
response statements is to place the students in groups of three
to five to share them. They might read them aloud or pass the
papers around. The sophistication of the group will dictate
how much assistance the students will need with the discussion.
They might, for instance, be asked to look for differences and
similarities in their statements. Or, if the teacher thinks it
necessary, he or she may raise more specific questions to guide
the talk—do they have different feelings about the work?
different perceptions of what takes place? different impres-
sions of a character? different judgments of the work's
quality? different impressions of the author's intention?

Relying upon the written responses of the students does
several things for the teacher of literature. First of all, it
forces his students to find some point of connection with the
work, so that the personal element cannot be ignored. In so
doing it allows the natural motivations of the reader to
operate. Second, it provokes discussion, by eliciting dif-
ferent perceptions of the work. Third, it prevents the teacher
from being distracted by the irrelevancies of the textbook's
pedagogical paraphenalia. He or she cannot substitute the
miscellaneous information about literature for the experience
of reading when students have been invited to deal with the
significance of the works. Hartman says that

> We can only urge that readers, inspired by hermeneutic
> traditions, take back some of their authority and be-
> come both creative and thoughtful, as in days of old.[10]

Students need to have a taste of that authority, so that they
may begin to take responsibility for themselves, and for the
vision of the world that they will either create for them-
selves out of their experiences, literary and otherwise, or
absorb mindlessly from the prefabricated visions the culture
is all too eager to offer them.

This rather lengthy discussion of the possibilities in-
herent in the response statement may suggest similar possible
variations in some of the following patterns, which we will
consider more briefly.

The response paper:

An obvious extension of the five-minute written response is the response paper. Bleich, in Readings and Feelings,[11] discusses the possibilities at length. The response paper is essentially an elaboration of the briefer statement, allowing the student time and space to reflect upon and develop the ideas that may be only vaguely and lightly touched in the shorter essay. Students must work up gradually to this, because the openness of the assignment will be intimidating at first.

The assignment, basically, is "Read, then write." As in the briefer writings, the purpose is to allow students to find, and then follow, their own paths through the literature. The assignment cannot be too specifically made, or it will constrain the students, telling them too much about what to say and how to say it.

In her work with secondary school students, Suzanne Howell has devised two structures for the response paper that she offers as suggestions, but not requirements, for her students. They provide more structure and direction than the completely free writing, but still allow the students a great deal of latitude. They are:

I

Part One.
Your immediate response to the story, organized more logically than random thoughts.
Part Two.
One element of your response developed, possibly,
    a) some association that you make with the story—another story, etc.
    b) a relevant personal experience
    c) an idea that the story brings to mind
Part Three.
Come back to the story. What was it in the story that created this particular response in you?

II

Part One.
Your immediate response to the story, followed by questions raised in your mind by the story.
Part Two.
Your attempt to answer the questions, based on the story and on your own experience.

Part Three.
What effect do you think the writer wanted to create?
What is there in the story that makes you think the
writer was trying for this particular effect?

Some teachers, knowing how susceptible these children are
to suggestions by teachers, may feel that the structure of the
assignments is too confining, but Howell reports that the re-
sults of these assignments were extremely satisfying:
"Engagement with the material resulted in papers which said
something, and said it well."[12]  Teachers may decide for them-
selves whether the more open ¬equest to write about responses,
or the more tightly structured assignments Howell suggests,
work better in their classroom.

As with the shorter writing, the students will be able to
base their discussion upon the written statements they've pro-
duced.  If time and finances allow, papers may be reproduced
and distributed to the class.  Discussion may then be organized
in a variety of ways, according to the skills of the group and
the inclinations of the teacher.

Immediate response:

Rosenblatt says that it is

essential to scrutinize all practices to make sure
that they provide the opportunity for an initial
crystallization of a personal sense of the work.[13]

Written responses have the virtue of allowing time for the
students to formulate their own impressions of the work, but in
the interest of varying the procedures in the classroom it is
occasionally appropriate to omit the writing and launch im-
mediately into conversation about the work.  When the teacher
tries this approach, it may be helpful to rush the students a
bit, asking them quickly for their immediate reactions to the
work read.  If they are willing to play a free-association game
during the first several minutes of the discussion, they may
spill out enough ideas to sustain the talk for the rest of the
period.

Calling for immediate, unconsidered response is probably
most useful in dealing with very short works—poems or stories
that can be read aloud and discussed within one class period.
Longer works, demanding time outside of class, do not submit
to this technique, unless, of course, the teacher wishes to
select a short passage for the focus of discussion.

39

Associational response:

One of the most powerful techniques is to present a short work (or selection from a longer work) that seems likely to stimulate reflections on related personal experiences, and then to direct the students to recall that experience. One such activity, devised by Anne Turner, invites students to read from A Separate Peace a passage dealing with the difficulties of expressing feelings.

Finny has said that Gene is his best friend, and Gene reflects that,

> It was a courageous thing to say. Exposing a sincere emotion nakedly like that at the Devon School was the next thing to suicide. I should have told him then that he was my best friend also and rounded off what he had said. I started to; I nearly did. But something held me back. Perhaps I was stopped by that level of feeling, deeper than thought, which contains the truth.[14]

It is a moving passage, and one with which the students are likely to have associations—few people have said everything they wished to say throughout their lives.

Ms. Turner asks the students, after reading the passage to them, to recall something they always wanted to tell someone, but had not been able to say. She provides several prompting questions:

> Why didn't you tell them?
> What is your relationship with this person?
> Why do you want to tell them?
> How would they feel or react if you did tell them?
> How would you feel if you did tell them?
> Would your telling them change, or would it have
>     changed, your relationship with the person?

Then she asks the students to write about the situation they have recalled, and then to discuss it in small groups. Finally, she asks them to relate the memory to the situation in A Separate Peace.

The personal association called to mind by the passage and the questions, especially when it is written about and dis- cussed, seems to deepen and sharpen the understanding of that section of the book. It is, of course, possible to confuse the

feelings produced by one's own memories with those evoked by
the text, or those represented in the text, but the discussion
can address that problem.  The blending of past and present,
remembered and evoked, is inevitable, regardless—it is only
our access to similar feelings that enable us to understand
those represented in print.

Bleich's sequence:

In his work with college students, Bleich has devised a
sequence of activities to guide his students through the
reading of a literary work.  Although he speaks of spending a
great deal of time at each of the four stages, it is possible
to compress them, and make of his four steps a single plan.
Thus modified, the steps are these:

Perceptions:  At this stage, students are asked to
concentrate upon paraphrase, to simply describe
what they observe in the work.  It is helpful to
ask them first to write, and then to talk, so that
they may be as little swayed by another's per-
ceptions as possible.

Impressions:  There are two parts in this step.
The first is to identify the feelings aroused by
the work—the "affect."  The second is to recall
the associations one makes with the work, much
as a student would do in Turner's activity.

Discussion of importance:  Here the student is
asked to consider,

the most important word,
the most important passage, and
the most important aspect.

One issue that arises, predictably, is the definition
of "important"—what it means depends upon the in-
dividual and the context.

Community interpretation:  At this point the question
becomes, What assumptions and perceptions does the
group share, and how do individuals vary from one
another in their perspectives and interpretations?

Bleich argues that the validity of the sequence lies in
its movement "from the most primitive, automatic, and un-
conscious experiences to the most complex and lately developed

41

capacities--intellectual and communal thought and inter-
action."[15]

Strict paraphrase:

For students who are too inclined to try predicting the
teacher's desired reply, Mandel suggests establishing ground-
rules for discussion that allow students to respond by "telling
only what you see in the work."[16] Students thus are not
interpreting, but rather are expounding on their "direct
experience" of the work. The differences in perceptions, even
without interpretive statements, are sufficient to sustain the
discussion. He also incorporates the Rogerian discussion
pattern that requires students to paraphrase the remarks of the
preceding speaker before embarking on their own, to ensure that
students are hearing one another.

The obvious value of this kind of discussion of the
literary work is that it eliminates any reward for intuiting
the teacher's view, or for guessing the correct critical
estimate of the work. It instead lends validity to transaction
between reader and text--an experience created by the student,
or as Mandel says, "a moment fully lived in the presence of
the artist's creativity...."[17] While giving credence to non-
interpretive responses, it at the same time demands, or
invites, a return to the text to explain the source for what
the student sees.

Though Mandel uses this technique, which he admits is
artificial, throughout his entire course, most teachers might
find such tightly constrained discussion more useful as an
occasional technique, rather than as the format for a full
quarter's work. Its proscription of inferential statements,
though useful in forcing students to attend to their percep-
tions as well as to their thoughts, may seem too confining
for more than a day or two at a time.

Defining the question:

If Mandel's technique forbids inference, a pattern sug-
gested by Richard Adler demands it. Adler suggests that every
story leaves the reader with unanswered questions. He comments
that

For too long we have tended to ask students questions,
bypassing their questions. Their responses become
responses to our questions, not to the work. If we
structure the focus for discussion, role playing, or

writing, we gamble that their questions and
concerns are the same as ours.[18]

Believing, as Iser does, that all students should be given
opportunities for establishing their own connections with the
literature, rather than simply obligated to hear about the
connections scholars have made, Adler asks students to make
lists of questions they feel are left unanswered in the story.

These lists are either shared immediately and discussed
within the class or used as possible writing assignments.  For
instance, after reading a mythological tale, "Echo and
Narcissus," Adler's readers posed the question, "What was the
story Echo told Hera to detain her?"  This question could
elicit a short discussion of possibilities for story lines, an
oral narrative developed by groups of students, or, as with
Adler's class, a written story developed by one group of
students.

Patterns of discussion:

Mandel, in Literature and the English Department, suggests
another technique, which is simply to place the responsibility
for the substance of the class on the students:

Each class meeting would take the direction of some
student's particular interest that day.  Never would
I set the discussion going in a direction suitable
to my own ends.[19]

Although the uncertainties of that strategy are apparent to any-
one who has waited desperately, through agonizing, interminable
silences, for students to respond to a simple question, it has
the merit of placing responsibility for identifying important
issues upon the students.

Regardless of how the talk is begun—with brief writings,
with extended essays, or with immediate responses, there are
several possibilities for varying the discussions.  One pro-
cedure that has worked well for some teachers is to begin with
pairs.  They are asked to talk about either the work or the
written responses to the work for a brief time, and then the
pairs are joined into groups of four.  The issues discussed in
each pair are then presented to the larger group.  With luck,
the pairs will have different ideas to share with one another,
and the discussion in the group of four will move beyond the
original talk.

Then the groups of four are combined into groups of eight, and the cycle is repeated. Here, talk becomes more difficult. The individual students have had some time to clarify and defend their opinions, and they may have become intransigent. The differences that have arisen in the separated groups may become clearer and more difficult to resolve.

Finally, the entire class is pulled together for the concluding analysis of the work. The differing responses to and interpretations of the work may be articulated as fully as possible, and though it is important not to expect or demand consensus, it is satisfying to reach some conception of the issues that have interested the group and the various stands taken by individuals within it. The purpose of the work is not to achieve unanimity or conformity, but to help individual readers determine their own perspectives—to help them take back their authority and responsibility for their own reading.

The making of knowledge:

What students conclude about a literary work will influence the way they see the world, and that, ultimately must be their own responsibility. What transpires in the classroom when discussions are conducted with respect for the individual's perceptions, for the work itself, and for the social process of sharing and building upon one another's ideas will be consistent with Bleich's vision of the school:

> ...the purpose of pedagogical institutions from the nursery through the university is to synthesize knowledge rather than to pass it along....[20]

Response-based teaching of literature encourages that making of knowledge. It invites students to find their own connections with the literary work, to respond to it honestly and freely, to examine those responses with as much intellectual energy as they can muster, and to communicate as fully as they can with their colleagues. The literature, dealing as it does with the significant events of human life, can then provide the material and experience from which the child's vision of human possibilities may be constructed.

## Notes

[1] Mario J. Valdes, "Toward a Structure of Criticism," New Literary History (vol. 3, #2), Winter 1972, p. 278.

[2] See, for instance, the 8th Yearbook of Comparative Criticism, Theories of Literary Genre, edited by Joseph P. Strelka (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1978).

[3] Robert Scholes, Semiotics and Interpretation. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, p. 15.

[4] Sec, for instance, Frank Lentricchia's After the New Criticism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980). An excellent brief survey of some of the current schools of critical theory is the Introduction to Jane P. Tompkins' Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980). Chapter one of Scholes' book is also an excellent and very brief summation of recent developments.

[5] Wolfgang Iser, The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication from Bunyan to Beckett. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974, p. 275.

[6] Eleanor Duckworth, "The Having of Wonderful Ideas," Harvard Educational Review, (vol. 42, no. 2), May, 1972, p. 217.

[7] David Elkind, "What Does Piaget Say to the Teacher?" Today's Education, November, 1972, p. 48.

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Ken Macrorie, Writing To Be Read. New York: Hayden Book Company, 1968.

[10] Geoffrey H. Hartman, Criticism in the Wilderness: The Study of Literature Today. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980, p. 161.

[11]David Bleich, Readings and Feelings:  An Introduction to
Subjective Criticism.  Urbana:  National Council of Teachers
of English, 1975.

[12]Suzanne Howell, "Unlocking the Box:  An Experiment in
Literary Response," English Journal, (vol. 66, no. 2),
February, 1977, p. 41.

[13]Louise Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration.  New York:
Noble and Noble, 1976, p. 69.

[14]John Knowles, A Separate Peace.  New York:  Dell
Publishing Co., 1959, p. 38.

[15]David Bleich, Readings and Feelings, p. 5.

[16]Barrett John Mandel, "Text and Context in the Teaching
of Literature," English Journal, (vol. 68, no. 9), December,
1979, p. 43.

[17]Ibid., p. 44.

[18]Richard Adler, "Answering the Unanswered Questions,"
Re-Vision:  Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1974-1975,
ed. by Allen Berger and Blanche Hope Smith.  Urbana:  National
Council of Teachers of English, 1974, p. 72.

[19]Barrett John Mandel, Literature and the English
Department.  Urbana:  National Council of Teachers of English,
1970, p. 51.

[20]David Bleich, Subjective Criticism.  Baltimore:  Johns
Hopkins University Press, 1978, p. 133.

# A READER-RESPONSE APPROACH TO THE TEACHING OF LITERATURE

Sandra Harris, Shawnee High School, Louisville, Kentucky

If our fundamental concern as English teachers is our students, to get "back to the basics" we are compelled to provide a curriculum built around student needs and interests. If our major goals as teachers are to help students learn how to learn, to help them become self-fulfilled individuals and self-reliant readers, writers and thinkers, these goals are best achieved in an English classroom that stresses the affective as well as cognitive aspects of learning. These goals are best achieved in a classroom that is experience-based and in a state of flux as students participate together in the learning process. Recent rhetorical criticism acknowledges the needs of the reader; it therefore helps teachers of literature to understand the literary experiences of our student readers. Wolfgang Iser and Louise Rosenblatt are two theorists who base their critical procedures on rhetorical theories that emphasize reader response, rather than the author's intention in a work, or the adequacy of a text. By applying their reader-response theory to an often-used text, I hope to show the value of using this procedure to teach literature in the student-centered classroom.

## I
## The Rationale

The rationale behind a reader-response approach to teaching literature lies in certain assumptions about learning which emphasize the needs of students rather than those of teachers and administrators. First is the assumption that students are curious about their surroundings and bring this self-perpetuating curiosity and desire to learn into the classroom.

47

49

Instead of blunting this curiosity, as is so often done in school, teachers should build upon this natural desire to learn. Learning best takes place in a non-threatening atmosphere in which students can be creative, can explore, question, and share ideas. Significant learning also takes place when self-evaluation is more important than teacher-evaluation and when students are responsible for their participation in the learning process. Furthermore, learning is acquired best by doing, and the most lasting and pervasive learning is that which involves the feelings as well as the intellect. Finally, learning is a dynamic process, and learning the process of learning helps students become open to experience and the process of change.

What implications do these assumptions about learning have for the teaching of literature in the secondary English class-room? Certainly they suggest that we focus on process and on the student rather than the subject, and on the reader rather than the text. Because Iser and Rosenblatt are concerned with the reader who experiences the literary work and with the interaction between text and reader, their theories are appropriate for teaching literature in the student-centered English classroom.


## II
## The Theories

Both Rosenblatt and Iser consider reading a creative activity and a dynamic process, an experience which occurs at a particular time and place in which the reader conditions and is conditioned by the text. According to Iser, a successful reading experience is one in which the reader is an active participant in the process, recreating in the imagination the world presented by the text. This process is not smooth and continuous, but frequently interrupted by "gaps" in the text which invite the reader to interact. That which is implied in the text engages the reader's imagination and makes him or her a participant in the reading event. In fiction, for example, the reader is given access to the text by the narrator, characters, and plot which guide and channel him or her, suggesting what should be visualized. From this textual structure the fluent reader goes through a process of antici-pation and retrospection, gaining new information and modifying expectations as he or she reads.

The interruptions in the text confronted during the process can be surprises for the fluent reader, who responds by drawing on his or her horizon of accumulated information to bridge the gaps and modify expectations as the reading continues. More often than not, teachers are faced with students who are not fluent readers and who do not always have successful reading experiences. When a basic reader encounters an interruption in the process, he or she may become confused or frustrated and choose not to respond. As teachers of literature we need to be aware of those points in the text that can be potential sources of frustration or confusion for the student and help insure that they are points where he or she interacts with the text. We cannot, of course, anticipate all the gaps for our students, but by helping them respond at crucial points, we can at least facilitate the process and provide for their participation in it.

Iser is primarily concerned with fiction and does not suggest a pedagogical application of his theory, but his description of the reading process is valuable in helping teachers locate and prevent potential problems in a student's reading activity. Like Iser, Rosenblatt sees the reader as an active participant in the literary experience, which she defines as a "transaction" between the text and reader. According to Rosenblatt, the process of reading involves first responding to linguistic cues and adopting either an efferent or aesthetic stance to the work (an efferent stance is one in which the reader approaches the text concerned primarily with what information can be carried away from the reading, whereas an aesthetic stance is one in which the reader approaches the text primarily concerned with what is experienced during the reading activity). The reader then develops organizing principles or a "framework" which guides him or her through the text; different literary genres make their own kinds of conventional demands on the reader, but past literary experiences are "subliminal guides" which indicate what genre to expect and what details and patterns to look for. This framework arouses expectations that are fulfilled, reinforced or frustrated, requiring perhaps a revision of the framework and a rereading which stimulates further expectation. Finally, from the organizing activity of the reader, the text is decoded and the final synthesis achieved. Below, for comparison, are Iser's and Rosenblatt's paradigms of the reading process:

ISER
(The structured act of reading)

ROSENBLATT

'1) The reader enters the text
through the narrator, characters,
and plot, channels which guide
and control him or her during
the process.

(1) The reader responds to
cues in the text and adopts
an efferent or aesthetic
stance.

(2) The structured act of
reading is generated by gaps
in the text which invite the
render to respond.

(2) The reader develops a
tentative framework or
organizing principles which
guide him or her through
the text.

(3) The reader assembles meaning
during a process of anticipation
and retrospection, as new infor-
mation (theme) in viewed against
old information (horizon), causing
him or her to modify expecta-
tions.

(3) This arouses expecta-
tions that are fulfilled,
reinforced, or frustrated.

(4) This perhaps requires
revision of the framework
and rereading which
stimulates further
expectation.

(4) The goal of the reading
experience, finding coherence
and consistency in the text,
is achieved.

(5) Finally, due to the
organizing activity of the
reader, the text is decoded
and the final synthesis
achieved.

Rosenblatt's paradigm for the reading process is noticeably
similar to Iser's. For both, reading is a process in which
expectation functions to propel the reader through the text.
For Iser, the reader interacts with the text by filling in the
gaps which interrupt the process. Likewise, for Rosenblatt,
the transaction between text and reader involves the reader's
drawing from his or her own resources to fill in the gaps, or
to realize the "blueprint" which the text provides. Both
theorists see the reading process as controlled by the text,
but factors outside the text also determine reader response.
Iser says that the manner in which a reader responds to the
text depends on his or her disposition. Although any response
to the text is partly subjective, the text does restrict those
responses. Rosenblatt suggests that the reader brings to the
literary experience his or her own background of experiences
and memories, a moral, social and psychological code, a unique
world view, and a particular physical and emotional condition,

all of which help to determine response.  Experiencing the
literary work involves synthesizing these emotions and atti-
tudes with what the literary text offers.


## III
## Classroom Application

Therefore, our emphasis as teachers of literature should be
on the transaction between text and reader, and our aim to im-
prove the quality of our students' literary experiences.  Since
the transaction between reader and text involves evoking those
components of experience to which the text refers, teachers
must know their students and understand their backgrounds and
personalities.  Teachers must also know the literary materials,
so that they can select from a wide range of literature which
appeals to the needs and interests of the students.  Acting as
initiators and guides through the process of inductive learn-
ing, rather than imposing artificial patterns on students,
teachers should allow students to develop insight stimulated by
their own feelings and curiosity about literary experience.  To
foster fruitful transaction, understanding and growth, teachers
need to create a setting which stimulates spontaneity and leads
toward participation with the literary work.  In an atmosphere
that is not threatening to them, students should be allowed to
respond freely to what they read and be encouraged to share
their responses with each other, so that the literary ex-
perience can mean something personal to them.  This favorable
atmosphere also initiates a process whereby students can
clarify and enlarge their own responses built on their personal
reactions to the experience of a literary work.  The teacher
can help students combine their subjective responses with what
they want to say to others by having them express their feel-
ings orally and in writing before, during, and after their
reading.  Each experience with a literary work can then
enhance students' further reading experiences.

The reader-response approach used in the following class-
room assignment is geared particularly for basic readers who
often have trouble participating in a literary event, and it
considers these characteristics of primary importance:

(1)  The teacher must take into consideration this
reading process of anticipation and retrospection that
is constantly interrupted by gaps which invite reader
response.

(2) The teacher must allow for personal response to
a literary work without artificially imposing patterns
ao that students' feelings and experiences are
elicited by the text.

(3) The teacher must allow students to share their
responaes openly with each other.

(4) The teacher must direct students to develop their
responses in order to enhance future reading experience.

The novel Of Mice and Men by John Steinbecl 's an ap-
propriate literary experience for high school st._nta because
it is concerned with the advantages and r'sks of a close friend-
ship. Because of its readability, it is especially appropriate
for basic readers. To set the stage for a spontaneous approach
to the novel, the teacher may begin with an informal discussion
that arouses students' curiosity about the story before they
read. The following questions serve as interest generators:

(1) What does the title mean to you? What questions
do you ask yourself about the story when you read the
title? or what do you wonder about the story when you
read the title?

(2) (If the book has an illustrated cover) What kind
of people do the two men on the cover look like?
What do you think their relationship is?

Questions like these can arouse students' curiosity about the
characters so that they will read to answer their questions.
After reading aloud the introduction in the first three pages
of chapter one, the teacher can discuss with the students how
well their expectations were met so far. Where does the story
take place? Who are George and Lennie and what are they like?
How are they different from each other? These questions help
students modify their expectations made before reading and
encourage them to continue reading the first chapter. As long
as students are reading with expectations, they are motivated
to continue reading the story. Problems can arise when stu-
dents are making expectations based only on information or
feelings outside the story, or don't respond appropriately to
cues in the text; then they become frustrated or confused by
information that they do not understand. Having students
respond in writing as well as orally during their reading gets
them to objectify their subjective responses to a work and to
synthesize their personal feelings and experiences with what is
actually in the text. By keeping a written journal before,
during and after reading, students are helped to develop

insights stimulated by their own feelings and curiosity about literature, and the journal gives them a record of their reading experience in the form of notes which can be expanded in their later writing about the book. Since a misreading is due to the reader's misleading expectations, the journal also provides a helpful record of students' responses written while reading for the teacher to observe.

The number of times the reading is interrupted to write responses should be determined by how experienced the students are as readers; fluent readers often resent too many inter-ruptions during their reading, while non-fluent readers often need to have discussed points of a text that give them problems, so as to prevent confusion later in the book. The teacher needs to be sensitive to the students' need to share their responses with each other and to encourage spontaneous discussion about the book. The following questions were designed for basic and general high school juniors, some who had never read a com-plete novel before. Students were asked at the end of each chapter to write responses to what they had read, as well as make predictions about future chapters. Two samples of student responses follow each set of questions:

Response Number One (end of Chapter 1)--Respond to Lennie and George. What is their relationship like? What do you think of them? Where are they headed? Why?

    (A) My feelings about Lennie and George are that they don't seem to get along good without one another. When one is gone, the other would be completely lost. Their relationship is tit-for-tat. Like, one almost isn't bright as the other. Lennie is slightly slow. He forgets everything. George usually would have to remind Lennie of just about everything. They were headed a few miles south of Soledad to a ranch because they were hoping to get a job.

    (B) I feel that Lennie and George are a good pair be-cause George understands Lennie's problem and tries to help him get along through life, and he helps him when Lennie gets hisself in trouble, and tries to keep him a job. They are headed to find a job. And try to make a living for theirselves and find a house or a ranch.

Response Number Two (end of Chapter 2)--Respond to these characters: Curly, Curly's wife, Slim, Candy. Do you feel any tension between any of the characters? What do you think may happen?

(A) I dislike Curly because he has a very bad attitude and I dislike his wife because she tries to flirt even though she's married. Slim thinks that he is cool. And I can't tell ou much about Candy.

(B) Curly is a guy who likes to tangle because he always picks on guys who are bigger than him. Curly's wife act like she want the guys that stay in the bunk she always walking around giving everybody the eye. Slim is a guy who stands out in a crowd. Candy is a friendly guy who loves his dog. He doesn't have a family or anything. I like Curly's wife because she make the fellows in the bunk house think about ladies and she makes them angry sometimes and she makes me laugh. I dislike Curly because he thinks he a bully and he's always going to pick on Lennie.

Response Number Three (end of Chapter 3)—Write your response to the killing of Candy's dog. Why does Candy say he should have killed the dog himself? Do you believe in mercy killings for animals? for humans?

(A) I would call the death of Candy's dog a "mercy killing" because he was killed because he was old and was no use for anyone. Even though he had the dog when he was a pup, he felt that he should have killed him hisself. I don't believe in mercy killing for anybody because I don't believe in taking other peoples' lives. That's not right.

(B) I believe Candy's dog was getting old and out of feeling and they didn't want to see the dog suffer. He was killed because he wasn't no good to no one, he didn't have no teeth, he stinks and was old and suffering. But Candy said he ought to have killed the dog because he felt that he should have not let a stranger kill the dog. I believe in mercy killings for animals but not for humans.

Response Number Four (end of Chapter 4)—Who is Crooks? Why is he lonely? What are his and some of the other characters' dreams for the future and how do they compare to yours?

(A) The Negro stable buck is Crooks. He is black and he is left out of the rest of the ranchers. Crooks and Lennie are alike because they both seem to be rather slow. Candy, George and Lennie dreamed of owning their own land so they could hire anybody they wanted, and fire whoever they wanted. Their dream was important too because they

would be working for themselves. My dream of the future
is also to be successful.

(B) Crooks is a negro who is a stablebuck, he lives in
a barn away from the other guys. He has a crooked spine.
He was neat and a pretty aloof-man. He kept his distance
and demanded others keep theirs. Because most of the
ranchers around are owned by white people and there were
no colored men on the ranches. Lennie and George want
to find them a small place, piece of land that they can
call their own. Candy wanted to join up with Lennie and
George because he had no family and he didn't want to be
lonely. Because that's the only things that they are
hoping for.

Response Number Five (end of Chapter 5)—Write your response to
the killing in the barn. How does your reaction compare to
Candy's? George's? Curly's? Who, if anyone, do you think
is to blame? What do you think is going to happen?

(A) Curly's wife's neck was accidently broken by Lennie.
Because she was talking about how soft her hair was and
she let Lennie touch it. She started screaming when
Lennie got to handling her hair too ruff. Lennie tried
to keep her from screaming and panics. The ranchers
are anxious to find Lennie.

(B) The killing in the barn surprised me because I
thought that Lennie was not ever gonna associate with
her in the beginning. It happened because he panic
because he began stroking her head too hard and she
began to cry and scream and he panic and began shaking
her until all of a sudden her neck broke. No, because
she had no business around him she ought to know better.
Yes, because anytime someone takes the life of another
they are at fault.

Response Number Six (end of Chapter 6)—Write your response to
the killing in the last chapter. Does George make the right
decision? Why or why not?

(A) Lennie goes to the brush because he remembers what
George told him to do if he got in to any trouble.
Lennie was shot by George. George makes the right
decision to shoot Lennie because if he didn't shoot
Lennie, Curly would have shot him.

(B) Lennie goes to the brush because he doesn't forget
what George told him when he gets into trouble (go to
the brush and hide). After Candy sees that Curly's wife
is laying dead he goes and tells George and then they
go and find Lennie to kill him but instead George finds
him and shoots him because he didn't want to see Lennie
tormented. No, I don't think he made the right decision
because who is he to make the decision to kill another
person or not.

The totally different responses made to Curly's wife in
Response Number Two do not indicate a misreading, but different
attitudes brought to the literary experience from the readers'
personal experiences. However, in response to Number Four,
Student A reveals a misreading of the text when she says,
"Crooks and Lennie are alike because they both seem to be
rather slow." She has mistakenly equated Lennie's intel-
lectual deficiencies with Crook's isolation. Crooks is, in
fact, as evidenced by the books he keeps in his room, the only
one on the ranch who is well-read, and this student's mis-
reading could keep her from perceiving the prejudice of the
ranchers and understanding their subsequent descrimination
against Lennie at the end of the book. The same student,
nevertheless, was able to synthesize her personal feelings
with the text, as her later response illustrates. She writes
in response to Number Three: "I don't believe in mercy
killing for anybody because I don't believe in taking other
peoples' lives. That's not right." She readjusts her personal
feelings about mercy killing in Response Number Six where she
makes allowances for the shooting in the novel: "George makes
the right decision to shoot Lennie." She has allowed her
personal feelings to be controlled by the text. Although
Student B maintains in accordance with her feelings that
George was wrong to shoot Lennie, she has not misread the text
and does recognize that his actions were motivated by love.

These written student responses serve not only as records
for the teacher, but also as notes for the students to help
them with their later writing. One such writing assignment
built on their written responses might be to have students
write a defense of George Milton to a jury explaining why he
is innocent of cold-blooded murder. Students would be required
to re-examine the story in light of Lennie's and George's
relationship so as to support George's act of love.

IV
## Summary

Both Iser and Rosenblatt define reading as an activity in which the reader seeks a coherent experience, and both describe it in non-evaluative terms. Because the reader's structured responses to the text "make the poem", each reading is individual; however, these responses are controlled by the text. The individual memories and feelings that are evoked in each reader differ in each case, and it is crucial to their experience of the story that they are encouraged. However, the students' attention must be directed back to the text on which their responses are based, so that there is convergence between the text and reader at the end (Iser), or a decoding of the text and final synthesis (Rosenblatt). Participation of the students is encouraged through their written and oral responses all through the reading process. This method helps provide an inductive process of learning which draws personal response from students and refers them to the text to support their response; it also allows them to review their reading and reflect on what they have read, as well as synthesize details to reinterpret their previous sense of things in light of their literary experience. The reader-response approach to teaching literature is a pedagogically sound one. It focuses on the needs and interests of the student and approaches learning as a process. It is, in summary, a valid approach crucial to the student-centered English classroom.

## Bibliography

Iser, Wolfgang. The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic
    Response. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University
    Press, 1980.

Piper, Michael and Joseph Comprone. "Literature and
    Comp ition." Kentucky English Bulletin. Northern
    Kentucky University, Fall 1981. Vol. 31, No. 1.

Rogers, Carl. Freedom to Learn. Columbus: Charles E.
    Merrill Publishing Co., 1969.

Rosenblatt, Louise. Literature as Exploration. New York:
    Noble and Noble Publishers, Inc., 1968.

_____. The Reader, the Text, the Poem. Carbondale:
    Southern Illinois University Press, 1978.

# ENHANCING RESPONSE TO LITERATURE: AN INSERVICE APPROACH

Susan S. Kissel and
Peter M. Schiff, Northern Kentucky University

"The 'separate but equal' idea of writing and literature has been my practice in the past but the results of separate topic assignments have never been as good as I had hoped. My experiences with integration of these aspects has been limited to textbook ideas and I am anxious to develop some of my own."

—an eleventh-grade English teacher

"Most beneficial to me would be learning new or different methods used in teaching literature and ways to apply them to my own situation. What goes on in the classroom is my central concern. I would enjoy seeing real interaction between students and literature in my class."

—an eighth grade language arts teacher

"I believe that the literature of a culture reflects the thinking of its people and that a knowledge of literature affects the development of values and philosophy. I am continually seeking better ways of presenting and integrating literature into the academic process."

—a tenth grade English teacher

These Kentucky and Ohio secondary school English teachers were concerned that their literature teaching had become arid. They and their students wanted something more than an assignment to "take out your anthologies and read the next twelve pages of The Deerslayer." They wanted more than questions asking, "What is the setting?" "Can you summarize the plot?" or "How would you describe the main character?"

These teachers craved ideas for teaching literature that provoked students to make connections between their lives and the literature they read. They sought methods that capitalized upon what they knew was the inter-dependence c* literature, composition, and language study. Most of all, they were looking for techniques that would work in their remedial, honors, or heterogeneously grouped classes.

With the assistance of twelve secondary school English teachers and five secondary school administrators, we planned a summer inservice institute that would address these needs. We made application for financial support from the National Endowment for the Humanities and when we received word that we had been funded, we went to work.

Applications for the five-week program were solicited from throughout the northern Kentucky, southern Ohio, and south-eastern Indiana regions. After reviewing letters of application and holding on-campus interviews, we accepted twenty-five eager, experienced (at least three years of teaching), articulate professionals into the program. Here are some principles for enhancing student response to literature which those teachers discovered from their readings, from eleven workshop presenters, and from each other:

1. <u>Use writing to understand literature</u>. Workshop presenters Judith Bechtel and Frances Zaniello stressed that students gain insight into whatever literature they read through writing. By responding in a journal assignment or through a short, in-class paper to associations called forth by poetry, prose, or drama, students can make legitimate connections between their experiences and the meaning of a text.

Institute participants' responses to Nikki Giovanni's "Legacies," about a granddaughter's refusal to allow her grandmother to teach her how to bake rolls, highlighted the varied interpretations available to students. One teacher associated the poem with her own grandmother, wishing she had accepted proffered wisdom when the woman was still alive. Another suggested that the communication gap between the older and younger women reminded her of tough days with her own tenth graders. Two others associated the poem's central experience with male relatives who had been influential early in their lives. One remembered her disinterest in her Polish ancestry until too late—a pain which she still associates with her grandparents' deaths. All the participants' responses grew from their personal knowledge and experience; yet each was true to the text.

These initial responses led participants to coherent oral discourse which, in turn, called forth more coherent oral response. The stimulating discussion which resulted from writing and then sharing personal response to literature provided an important example of the power of reader-response techniques in the literature classroom.

2. <u>Break out of the canon, occasionally</u>. When teachers mentioned classes that they felt had gone stale, they always also mentioned works deemed part of the traditional literary canon. Worthwhile as they insisted <u>Silas Marner</u>, <u>The Scarlet Letter</u>, and <u>Return of the Native</u> were, institute members were searching for stimulating works rarely taught in secondary schools to intersperse throughout the required curriculum.

Participants were introduced to sources of regional, autobiographical literature (e.g., a Civil War letter from a young girl to her aunt in Boone County, Kentucky; a journal kept by a turn-of-the century woman whose family lived in the Ohio River communities of St. Joseph, Ohio, and Ludlow, Kentucky; a lighthearted account of a visitor's stopovers in Cincinnati, Ohio, and Covington, Kentucky, in 1844). They were directed to literature having particular appeal to adolescents and written by Japanese-Americans (e.g., Jeanne Wakutsuki Houston and James D. Houston's <u>Farewell to Manzanar</u>), Jewish-Americans (e.g., Chaim Potok's <u>The Chosen</u>), and Southern American women (e.g., Sue Ellen Bridgers' <u>Home Before Dark</u>). They reaffirmed their sense of the power of literature to increase social sensitivity by experiencing contemporary American women writers, including: Leslie Marmon Silko (Native American); Teru Kanazawe (Asian American); Ana Castillo (Chicana); Lucille Clifton (Black); and Linda Pastan (Jewish). Having learned of the many non-traditional selections available and accessible to secondary students, these teachers sought more noncanonical works with which to expand their students' and their own personal and literary horizons.

3. <u>Use small group activities to get students sharing responses</u>. From speech and communications specialist Stephen Boyd, institute members learned how to organize small groups so as to encourage student decision-making, participation, and active listening. In addition, the Kentucky and Ohio teachers discovered they should (1) know their students before using groups (mingling "cheerleaders" with peacemakers and decision makers), (2) specify the goals of group work before it begins (providing topics suitable for a variety of purposes, whether problem solving, enlightenment, or ventilation of feelings), and (3) establish at the outset workable group norms for constructive peer interaction as well as definite time limits to provide closure.

Putting small-group theory into practice, Sally Jacobsen led a workshop in response to scientific literature. Working in groups of four to six people, participants reacted to Stephen Jay Gould's essay, "On Human Babies as Embryos" by answering one of three questions: (1) What associations does this essay comparing human with primate gestation call forth? (2) How might you help students deal with the content, particularly the scientific concepts, in this piece? (3) What sorts of problems do you envision in teaching this essay (e.g., censorship because of what might be interpreted as the author's Darwinian bias, specialized vocabulary unfamiliar to some students, pupil disinterest in the topic)? Each group appointed a reporter who related the group's findings to the institute after twenty minutes of discussion. The result was a variety of cogently expressed reactions to a provocative essay. The teachers agreed that the carefully structured small group approach not only yielded many thoughtful responses to a single work of literature, but also would help students improve speaking and listening skills.

4. <u>Bring the other humanities to bear upon literature.</u> Participants admitted that they had long accepted the dictum that "literature is art." Three workshop presenters took them beyond that simple statement to more complex comparisons between "written art" and other humanistic endeavors. Robert Wallace and Robert Rhode helped participants make explicit connections between music and literature as well as between art and literature. Teachers were invited to consider, for example, the comparative facility with which the artist Goya and writer Poe manipulated aspects of their crafts to create chilling, provocative art works.

Taking a similar tack, Thomas Zaniello encouraged institute members to examine differences and similarities in the techniques of narration as expressed through film and literature. Zaniello directed workshop participants to: (1) view a short film, "Death of a Peasant"; (2) divide a sheet of paper into two columns, one headed, "What does the narrative film do that a short story could not?" the other headed, "What would a short story have that the narrative film did not?"; (3) write down items under each column and share them in discussion with other workshop members. From this sharing there developed a lively discussion in which participants made astute observations about film's power to bring motion and color to fiction and about fiction's ability to convey a sense of the narrator's persona in ways that many films do not. Through these sessions on music, art, and film, the secondary teachers discovered the power of the arts to enrich student lives as they sharpen literary response.

5. Help students understand the assumptions they bring to literature. David Bishop, an expert in the psychology of reading, showed teachers how we all bring "schema," or sets of assumptions about how given events unfold, to our reading. Thus, we assume Western novels will involve a good guy/bad guy confrontation, or sports fiction will call for the main character to overcome odds to "win the game." When these schema are lacking, as with traditional works such as Silas Marner, The Scarlet Letter, or Return of the Native, participants learned that they could help by asking students to write about what they imagine life would be like in a different time or place and by providing short accounts from period newspapers or diaries to present a context for a work.

Challenging pre-established schema as they read also can help students learn about language and about themselves. To do this, students might be given the beginning of a story, asked to write out a "plausible" conclusion and then to contrast this with the actual ending of the literary work. Or, students might list beliefs about a particular situation (e.g., "When police and criminals meet, a high speed chase will follow," or "When movie actors gain fame and fortune, they will invariably become miserable, isolated souls.").

Working from this principle of prescripted response, workshop presenter Michael Wiesner showed how great detective fiction writers, such as Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, play upon readers' expectations. By examining such fiction, students can develop understanding of the logic behind the construction of a tight mystery plot and also learn to question some of the stereotypes (the American "tough guy" detective; the dotty old woman sleuth) that such fiction may sometimes reinforce. By helping students discover and confront schema before studying literature, workshop participants believed they could promote more active, more involved reading.

6. Challenge assumptions about what is knowable in literature. One of our guest consultants, David Bleich (author of Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism, Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975) asked participants to write what they thought Ernest Hemingway was trying to accomplish in the short story, "Hills Like White Elephants." In response, almost every teacher wrote a formal essay ascribing such motives to the author as a desire to show the power of men over women or to show the essential isolation of human beings. Bleich pointed out that we really cannot know Hemingway's motives. Instead, we bring to our interpretations the noble attributes we wish to ascribe to published authors.

Another Bleich assignment, this one a seemingly straight-
forward request to retell the Hemingway story, brought forth
a more informal set of responses, many of which included
personal associations and experiences informing individuals'
perceptions of the work. In essence, the teachers learned that
they, like their students, bring their own experiences to bear
upon literature even when asked to tell only the facts. Such
idiosyncratic retelling from within a class makes for a rich
collection of reader response to engender discussion. For,
it brings to response what students actually can know about
literature, their experiential associations with particular
works.

7. Define the purpose for reading. In her book, The
Reader, The Text, The Poem (Carbondale, Ill.: Southern
Illinois University Press, 1978), Louise Rosenblatt, our second
guest consultant, identified two ways of reading a text:
"efferent"--reading for key concepts and factual detail--and
"aesthetic"--reading to experience a range of sensations
identified with response to a moving work of art. Too often,
Rosenblatt argued, students are commanded by their teachers to
approach literature efferently. Pupils read to find out plot,
setting, and characters, while missing out on the aesthetic
delights that the language and artistry of Shakespeare,
Austen, or Dickinson can provide. To develop this aesthetic
awareness is a prime responsibility of secondary English
teachers--indeed an underlying reason for the existence of a
response to literature institute and its varied workshops.

Participant reaction to the intensive summer program was
strongly positive. Most institute members believed that they
had garnered practical methods for revitalizing literature
instruction. One teacher spoke for participants and institute
administrators alike when she asserted that the intellectual
stimulation was "almost overwhelming at times." However, all
participants agreed with the high school veteran who reflected
that the inservice program had "been a period of reaffirming
many techniques, rearranging many techniques, and renewing
the enthusiasm of this teacher."

And, how did the eighth-, tenth-, and eleventh-grade
teachers looking for ways to enhance their junior and senior
high literature classes fare with their own institute projects?
The eighth-grade teacher, concerned with "seeing real inter-
action between students and literature," developed response-
centered lessons on "Heroes/Heroines and Heroism," for use
with her junior high school's paired English/history classes.
The tenth-grade teacher, interested in the cultural value of

literature, planned a Shakespeare festival complete with student productions, student filming of scenes from Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar, showings of filmed versions of Othello and Taming of the Shrew, and a Shakespearean "dress up day" with students coming to school attired as specific characters. The eleventh-grade teacher, concerned with integrating writing and literature, worked on ways of doing just that. She developed a series of short, high-interest writing assignments for students to complete and discuss before, during and after reading works required in her American literature course. Other institute members developed plans for enhancing student response to ancient, medieval, twentieth-century, tragic, poetic, and other categories of literature—using art, the media, and music; using journals; using pre-reading written response, intra-reading associative and anticipatory responses, and post-reading reaction papers and peer group interaction to share meanings.

Participants are trying out these ideas this school year. All of us will meet for inservice "reunions" in the fall and spring. We will tell what methods have worked well and suggest which ones need revision before they can be successful. There may even be time to share recollections of an often fatiguing, yet always exciting summer's quest for ways to enhance student response to literature.

# FROM RESPONSE TO ANALYSIS: STRATEGIES FOR INVOLVING STUDENTS IN THINKING ABOUT LITERATURE

Kathleen W. Lampert, Wayland High School, Wayland, Massachusetts

One of the most difficult problems we confront as litera-
ture teachers involves ensuring that our students learn the
skills necessary for perceptive responses to complex literature.
Daily in the classroom we strive to avoid the pitfalls of
treating immediate responses to the surface of a literary work
as if they represented full understanding, or of stifling
spontaneity in the name of rigorous analysis. We recognize
our goals clearly: to develop in our classrooms stud  's who
are active participants in the transaction between re.   r and
text which is interpreting literature, and who can themselves
discover levels of meaning in the literature they read. What
sometimes elude us are the means to achieve that goal:
strategies which involve students directly in working on and
responding to the works they study, and which lead them to
discover meanings independently.

In the discussion which follows, I shall describe a
sequence of activities designed to lead students to responsive
analysis and interpretation of narrative fiction. These
strategies are based on my conclusion that we can achieve our
goals as literature teachers most effectively by teaching
students not the answers to questions about specific works or
literature but the application of generalizable strategies to
many works. The strategies I use derive from a basic assump-
tion about fiction: that its plot structure—the way the
events are selected and arranged to lead to a climax—conveys
the story's broader meaning.[1] I begin, therefore, by
introducing students to the nature of fictional plots. At
this stage, I use two activities: a "Six Events" game[2] and a
follow-up activity, "My Morning." Both are designed to help

students see that a series of events is not by itself an
interesting plot; interest is aroused when a series of events
involves "friction," a problem or conflict which creates
tension, and thus audience interest. In the "Six Events"
game, each student is asked to list six unrelated concrete
events on a sheet of paper, to tear the paper so that each
event is on a separate sheet, and to exchange the bundle of
slips with a student partner. Students are then asked to
"construct a story" out of the six events they receive,
arranging the events in any order they wish, and to tell that
story to their partners. I give no hints at this point about
what a "story" is. After partner story-telling, we talk as a
class about what they did to their bundle of events to turn
them into a story. If the discussion elicits the idea of making
a conflict or problem for a character and of solving the prob-
lem, or at least ending the story satisfactorily, then we have
developed the basic elements of a fictional plot. If, however,
as sometimes happens, the students become so engaged in
inventing wild conjunctions of events that they lose sight of
story-telling, I use the game as an ice-breaker and follow it
with "My Morning." I offer to tell them a story about my
morning, then treat them to a list of typical morning events
(e.g., turned off the alarm at 6:00, poured orange juice, made
tea, fried an egg...). Soon the protests come: "That's not
a story!" "Why not?" "It's boring!" "Why?" "Nothing
happens!" At this point, we can use their frustration as the
beginning of a discussion of events that "happen" in the real
world and the events that "happen" in stories. Eventually we
conclude that in fiction events are connected by more than
chronology, and that the connection usually involves friction,
a problem that interests us as readers. Students not only
enjoy these games, but become accustomed to actively par-
ticipating in discussion and in "working on" stories.

At this point, I give students a simple definition of
fiction. Fiction is built on plot. A plot is based on a
problem which is complicated by events until it reaches a
"climax" or point at which the problem is dealt with. I avoid
using the term "conflict" because it implies clear opposition
between two external forces for many students; similarly, I
avoid using "solved" in connection with the climax because
often the climax of a story does not present a neat solution
to the plot problem. As we discuss plot, I also indicate that
the character who has the problem is the main character and,
perhaps, that the forces which create the problem are sometimes
called the character's antagonists. We practice working with
these simple concepts on very short stories I invent until they
can handle the basic definitions. Then we begin doing "event
analyses" of professional stories.

The event analysis done by students is the first impor-
tant analytic activity in this sequence, and the activity from
which all later stages are developed. Its form is simple:
for each story assigned, students are to indicate in writing
the main character and problem, and to list the main events in
the story. At first we identify the climax in class; later,
students label it on the list of events they have prepared.
Class discussions involve comparing notes and making a class
version of the event analysis on the board. We may also
indicate relationships among events, distinguishing between
those which are related chronologically and those which are
causally related. Such discussions reinforce the ideas that
main events develop the plot problem, and that events in an
interesting plot are not simply sequential.

Students should begin this kind of analysis with stories
whose main characters and events are easily identifiable, and
whose plot problem is easy to isolate. Straightforward
adventure stories such as Connell's "The Most Dangerous Game"
or stories with clearly identifiable stages, such as Ray
Bradbury's "Time in Thy Flight" are quite easy to work with.
My class notes for an event analysis of "The Most Dangerous
Game" might look something like this:

Main Character:  Sanger Rainsford (antagonist:  General Zaroff)

Problem:  Surviving being hunted by the General (his
simple ideas about the hunter and the hunted?)

Main Events:

1. Discussion with Whitney (introduces plot ideas of being
   hunted, the existence of evil)
2. Falls overboard (device to get him to island)
3. Meets General and learns that General hunts men
   (similarity and difference in their characters)
4. The General chooses Rainsford as his quarry
5. Rainsford lays complicated trail
6. General follows him but does not shoot
7. Rainsford uses Malay man trap
8. General survives
9. Knife trick kills Ivan
10. Rainsford dives into the sea
11. General returns home disappointed
12. Rainsford wins final duel in General's bedroom

The parenthetical notes on plot ideas and character are more
relevant to later stages of the sequence than to simple event
analysis.

If I were using this story early in our study of plot, I would concentrate on identifying main events in class discussion. Students often have problems isolating main events; at first their event lists may include every action in the story. With some classes, I find class discussion sufficient to solve this problem. I remind them that a "main event" significantly develops the action related to the plot problem (that is, it adds to our understanding of the problem, is caused by the problem, or increases the tension in the story). We practice using those ideas on their lists, going over each event analysis carefully on the board. Other classes may benefit from being given mimeographed sheets for each story, with some main events already listed and a clear indication of the minimum or maximum number of "main" events indicated--10-14, for example, in "The Most Dangerous Game." Later, an indication of the minimum-maximum range of events should be sufficient guidance for them.

Using event analyses early in students' study of fiction has several advantages. In the first place, students develop the habit of working on the stories they read, and begin to learn that reading is an active process. Class discussions are usually lively and genuine explorations of issues because there is seldom only one right analysis. Students are also using the same technique on several stories, and thus practicing a generalizable skill rather than answering specific study guide questions. Finally, since event analyses are possible for stores at all levels of difficulty, teachers can structure practice sequences based on the same concepts for classes of varying ability levels.

Once students are comfortable with event analyses (and just before the repetition becomes monotonous), I introduce the next stage in the process of finding meaning: answering the question What is the story about? To answer this question, students must return to the event analysis of the story in order to translate its specific plot problem into a more general one. To do this they need to answer further questions: What more general idea or issue is the specific plot problem an example of? What more general idea or issue causes the specific plot problem? Practice with stories whose general plot problem is closely related to the specific one helps students here. The General's hunting human beings easily generalizes to "evil," or perhaps more specifically to "putting oneself above everyone else." In another old chestnut, de Maupassant's "The Necklace," students also see quite clearly that the heroine's specific problem, the cause of her actions, is her own greed (or her need to pretend she

69

has more social status than she has). It is then an easy step
for them to the idea of greed, or obsession with status, as the
gene.al plot problem. While it is possible to use new stories
at this stage, I often return to previously-discussed event
analyses, especially with students just beginning to analyze
fiction.

As students become comfortable with the idea of general
plot problem, they begin to see its causal relationship to the
main events. Often, as in "The Necklace," it is the main
character's dominant character trait. In other stories, it
is an external force in the character's world: the implacable
forces of nature in "To Build a Fire," the antagonist's
character in "The Most Dangerous Game," or an abstraction such
as civil war in O'Flaherty's "The Sniper." The concept works
equally well with stories at many levels of complexity, and
can provide a focus for a sequence moving from simple
(external) plot problems to those based in human psychology.
Because there is room in class discussion for genuine dis-
agreement, the students are less dependent on the teacher's
"right" answers in discovering a story's subject. They are
also continuing to work actively on stories and are
practicing a generalizable skill.

After students are able to identify general plot problems,
we can move to the final stage of the sequence, using their
event analyses and understanding of the general plot problem
to discover meanings in a story. Discovering meaning involves
understanding theme, not as an abstract concept which the
teacher mysteriously understands, but as the statement(s) or
suggestion(s) the story makes about its general plot problem.
In order to lead students to discover meaning, I have them
answer the question: What is the story saying about what it's
about (its general plot problem)? The question is cumbersome,
but it avoids the practical problems involved in discussing
"theme" without giving an operational definition of that term,
and the philosophical problems involved in asking about
"meaning."

The answers to the question lie in the climax of the story,
already identified by students, and in the author's voice.
The climax reveals through action (or lack of it) how we are
to understand the sequence of causally related events which
led up to it, and thus what statement(s) are being made about
the general plot problem. The author's voice also offers
important cues for interpreting that climax.

With beginning students, I try to use the climax as much as possible as the basis of interpretation, and deal with voice only indirectly.  For example, at the climax of "The Most Dangerous Game," Rainsford destroys General Zarkov.  Since General Zarkov represents egocentric evil, and since we have come to admire Rainsford's courage, resourcefulness, and recognition of values beyond the thrill of the chase, the climax strongly suggests that those qualities and values can defeat evil in the world.  Similarly, Mme. Loisel's ironic discovery at the climax of "The Necklace" that her suffering in order to repay her friend was unnecessary leads the audience to see that her character, her greed, or her need for status has caused her suffering.  Thus, the climax makes a statement about the general plot problem: that greed or pretense is ultimately self-destructive.  At the climax of "The Sniper," the main character discovers that he has shot his brother; if civil war is the general plot problem, then the climax reveals that the particular horror of civil war is that it leads brother to kill brother.  In this story, it is easy to discuss the role of voice in theme by asking how the audience is supposed to feel at the climax.  Few students will answer with positive emotions, even if tone or narrative point of view are not discussed formally.  Some will see the horror of the climax itself; others will recognize that the narrator's matter of fact, almost reportorial tone emphasizes that horror.  In either case, students see the story's statement about the particular horror of civil war.

Clearly, if students work with relatively simple stories, their statements of meaning will also be relatively simple, and that simplicity may appear to be an important limitation on the usefulness of this sequence of strategies.  For beginning students, I think this limitation is at least balanced by the fact that they develop an interpretation from their own work on the story.  More experienced readers can move on to more complex stories, such as Steinbeck's "The Chrysanthemums," in which interpreting the climax requires insight into complex emotions.  Or they can work with stories such as Roth's "The Conversion of the Jews" or Faulkner's "Barn Burning" in order to recognize that in each case the author's tone, in particular his sympathy with the main character, shapes our understanding of the story's climax, and hence of its theme.

Once students can use event analyses to develop their own interpretations of individual stories, they can begin to use their event analyses as the basis for evaluating stories, and thus move from analysis to evaluation surprisingly easily.

73

One activity which elicits particularly active student involve-
ment deals with evaluating a story's credibility.  I introduce
the idea of evaluation with an open-ended ranking activity in
which students are given the bare outline of a story about
Donald, a student who has an opportunity to cheat on an exam,
and four possible endings for his story.  Students are asked
to decide which endings are most and least believable to them,
and to rank the four endings numerically.[3]  I generally record
the class's ranking on the board without comment, then ask for
explanations from them for all their choices.  We move from
this introductory activity to similar activities evaluating the
credibility of individual stories which will be discussed in
class.  Before assigning each story in this sequence, I give
students a mimeographed sheet containing a brief plot summary
and four possible endings, three I have invented and one which
the author actually used.  For example, I might give them the
following sheet based on O. Henry's "After Twenty Years."

Consider the following story outline.  Then study the
possible endings listed after it.  Decide how you would rate
each ending (from best to worst) and be prepared to explain
why you rated each one as you did.

### The Story

Two boys grew up as best friends in New York City.
When they were eighteen and twenty, they had a last
dinner together, then the younger boy headed west to
make his fortune.  Before he left, they agreed to
meet again in twenty years at the restaurant where
they had their farewell dinner.  The older boy
stayed in New York.  He didn't hear from his old
friend during the twenty years.

a.  On the night 20 years later when they were supposed
to meet, the New Yorker received a telegram from his
old friend saying he couldn't be there because he had a
business conference in Chicago the next day.  He en-
closed a check for $50 so the man could take his wife
out to dinner.

b.  They met at the restaurant and spent hours talking
over old times.  At the end of the dinner, the man from
the West decided to return to New York to live because
his best and truest friend was in New York.  They
arranged to go apartment hunting together the next
day.

72

c. The man who stayed in New York became a policeman. Twenty years later, as he walked his beat, he met a man where he and his friend had arranged to meet. The man told him the story of the arrangement, without recognizing the policeman as his friend. The policeman realized his old friend was a wanted criminal and had another policeman arrest him.

d. The two men met as arranged. The man who went west became a rich rancher; the man who stayed east became a poet. They tried to talk to each other, but discovered they had changed so much they had little to say. After a short, uncomfortable dinner, they separated, each a little relieved that the evening was over.

We read the sheet for each story, then rank the endings according to their believability and discuss our reasons. Only after this discussion do we analyze and interpret the stories themselves. Finally, we compare our choices of endings with the author's. We can evaluate the author's choice by seeing if it is causally related to the sequence of events in the story, if it is consistent with the characters as we have come to understand them, and if it is consistent with our own knowledge of the world.

If I use stories with endings based on coincidence, such as "After 20 Years," discussions are particularly interesting. Students are torn between their enjoyment of a surprise ending and their discovery that there is little or no justification for that ending either in their own experience or in the event sequence in the story.

I sometimes develop this evaluation activity beyond individual stories. When we have a backlog of stories we've analyzed, I will often choose four for students to evaluate according to the relative credibility and consistency of their endings. In this case I make a grid on the board:

RANK

| TITLE | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

We fill it in and discuss individual rankings and the reasons
for them. We also identify class patterns. If I have chosen
stories which range from those based on coincidence through
adventure to psychology. discussions are lively as students
express their individual values. Some prefer the surprise
ending, others the clear conflicts of an adventure story, and
still others the insight into human nature provided by a
psychological study. I carefully refrain from giving my
rankings until after the discussion; if we disagree at that
point, they have a chance to compare their standards with mine
without having been influenced by them from the beginning.
More experienced students can do similar evaluation activities
focusing on the depth or freshness of the meanings developed
by a series of stories, or on realism or depth of characteri-
zation.

The three steps in this sequence—event analysis, identi-
fication of general plot problem, and discovery of statements
about that problem—can also be extended to fiction whose
structure is more ambiguous, or longer and more complex.
Twentieth-century writers such as Kafka or Joyce often de-
liberately violate or blur the clear structural principles
discussed here as a way of suggesting their own complex visions
of the world. Practice on stories that are not structurally
simple has the added advantage of reminding students that there
is no simple, mechanical formula for interpreting fiction.

74

Novelists and dramatists often develop their theme(s) through multiple plots. The segments of novels which each plot strand unifies can be treated as extended 'stories', with their own specific and general plot problems, main events, climaxes, and statements of meaning. When teaching a novel whose plot strands converge on a single theme, such as To Kill A Mockingbird or Kim, I begin by identifying plot segments for the class and asking them to do the analysis and interpretation of them. Later, especially with able students, we identify plot segments together, recognizing that those segments are defined by a single plot problem. Near the end of our study, we use the board to record the important information about each plot strand and to identify significant similarities in general plot problems and statements of meaning. We then build an interpretation of the novel's meaning(s) based on those similarities. Students who have practiced on individual stories recognize that their night's reading assignment in a novel is an active one and approach these complex activities with surprising confidence.

Finally, although the strategies I describe here all focus on the structure of fiction, using them does not preclude class emphasis on other aspects of a work: setting, character, or use of images and symbols. Writers frequently use descriptions of setting, for example, to suggest important aspects of the plot problem, main events, or main character, as in "The Chrysanthemums" where the opening paragraph establishes the sense of being trapped which is the main character's problem. In other stories, images and symbols are devices used by the author to share our response to events in the narrative sequence. Because all these uses of language are relatively sophisticated techniques closely related to the study of voice, I prefer to reserve discussion of them until students have practiced interpreting simpler, more plot-based stories.

I can make no claims that students who work with these strategies move directly to brilliant critical analyses of Crime and Punishment. I have noticed that the number of plaintive "I couldn't have seen that without you!" cries has diminished in my classroom. More importantly, providing students with strategies they can themselves use to discover meanings in literature can, I hope, lead them to participate actively in the reading process, and to experience the rewards that come from that participation.

## Notes

[1] The important role of voice (point of view and tone) in shaping how a reader interprets events I leave for later class discussion.

[2] Thia game waa introduced to me by Professor Charlea Duke of Murray State University.

[3] My source for Donald's story is also Charles Duke, Murray State University.

# RESPONDING TO LITERATURE FROM WITHIN: THE UNTOLD STORY GAME

Gary M. Salvner, Youngstown State University

The oldest new word in literature pedagogy is "response." Student responses to literature have been scrutinized for a long time in publications about English instruction. In her classic Literature as Exploration, for example, Louise Rosenblatt observed, "In the teaching of literature, then, we are basically helping our students to learn to perform in response to a text.... The reader performs the poem or novel, as the violinist performs the sonata. But the instrument on which the reader plays, and from which he evokes the work, is— himself."[1]

But if this concern with response is not new, it has at least been rediscovered in recent scholarly attempts to integrate the language skills of reading and writing.[2] In that scholarship the nature of written response to literature has again received serious discussion. Writing is again being seen as a uniquely valuable way of discovering what one has read and of making a response to that discovery.

For some time I have been exploring the use of instructional gaming to provoke useful written responses to literature from students. As structures for literature study, games seem promising for at least two reasons. First, they can easily be designed to accentuate those elements of narrative literature that students most easily respond to: character, setting, plot, theme, and image. Games, like stories, are about people, places, and events. Second, and most important, games allow students to enter the world of the book and to respond to that world from within—as participants, in some way, in the story. Response from such a participant becomes an imaginative extension of the work—a "performance" on the literature, as Rosenblatt would say.

"The Untold Story Game," reproduced below, illustrates this kind of gaming activity for the literature classroom. It may be used as a class exercise with any literary work in which one or more characters are sufficiently developed to invite expansion beyond the limits of the narrative. I have seen it used successfully in grades 7-12, and it could also be stream-lined for use with upper elementary students.

The only teacher preparations needed to make the game playable are to organize the class into reporting teams of four to six students and then to fill in the names of a character, work, and author on the blank lines in the middle of each team's TASK SHEET. All instructions to students are given in the game itself. With most classes, the activity can be completed in one 50-minute period.

A note on grading. Evaluations of gaming activities, if they occur at all, must emerge from the game's created world for the activity not to be damaged by them. In "The Untold Story," for example, the evaluator's only proper role is as editor of the publications presented in the game. In that role she might want to measure the overall quality of the writing, the appropriateness of the style for that particular publica-tion, the newsworthiness of the untold story, and the story's consistency with facts already known about the character (as revealed in the original work of literature).

### Notes

[1]Louise M. Rosenblatt, Literature as Exploration, 3rd ed. (New York: Noble and Noble, 1976), p. 279.

[2]An excellent article which discusses this integration is Anthony R. Petrosky, "From Story To Essay: Reading and Writing," College Composition and Communication, 33 (1982), 19-36.

## THE UNTOLD STORY GAME

### INTRODUCTION

Welcome to The Untold Story Game. This activity
will ask you as a group to cooperate on planning and
writing a short feature article about a character
from a piece of literature you have read recently.
During the game, you will work through a series of
steps to put that story together. How well you know
that character, how imaginative you are, and how
skillfully you follow instructions and work together
under a strict time limit will determine your success
in the game.

### GETTING STARTED

Ready to go? First complete the steps below in
order:

### Step 1: Get Organized

Before you do anything, get settled together in
a small circle and select a leader. The person you
select should be one who can coordinate your indivi-
dual efforts and keep the group moving. Once elected,
the leader should be given these materials.

### Step 2: Your Assignment

Now that you're settled, it's time to find out
more about what you'll be doing. A description of
your task appears on the next page (called the TASK
SHEET). Group leader: read this TASK SHEET aloud to
your group. (Notice that the sheet contains two
blanks that must be filled in. Don't worry about
those yet. Just say "blank" when you come to them.)

## Step 3: Some Specifics

Now it's time to fill in blanks (A) and (B) on
your TASK SHEET. Each of these blanks is to be filled
in with one item your group will select from the lists
on page 3. Note that the choices you make will con-
trol what you do for the rest of the game, so make
your selections carefully. Follow the suggestions
on page 3 under each list.

When you have made your choices, copy them in
the spaces on your TASK SHEET. Your TASK SHEET is
now complete. Read it once more to your group.
Then turn to page 4 for further instructions.

2

TASK SHEET

You are a team of investigative reporters
working for (A)_____.
You have just reported for work today and are casually
discussing the weather and yesterday's sports scores
when your editor and a person you don't know rush
into the room together.  Pointing at the stranger,
your editor bellows, "Get this person's story and
write it up fast!  I want it for today's edition."
Then your editor hurries out.

It seems that this person now standing in your
office has some important information that has never
·before been revealed about _____,
the fascinating character in the book _____
_____ by _____.
It is this "untold story" that your editor wants you
to piece together and write up.

Fortunately, the stranger in your office is most
cooperative.  Quickly you find out that the story has
to do with (B)_____
_____.
As you question this mysterious individual furt  r,
your team is able to gather enough specific details
for a fascinating feature article for your publica-
tion.

Now it's time to write that article.  It must be
done immediately to meet today's publication dead-
line.  When you have completed this sheet, turn to
page 4 for further instructions.

83

3

## Instructions for Completing Blanks (A) and (B) on TASK SHEET

BLANK (A): KIND OF PUBLICATION

Before you begin your story, you need to know something about the newspaper or magazine you work for. Luckily, you have a choice. Select one of the three publications listed below and write its name in the blank marked (A) on your TASK SHEET. Choose carefully. Your selection will tell you something about what kind of audience to write for and what kind of writing style to use.

1. The National Snoop—the country's leading gossip newspaper. Articles in this paper are sensationalistic. The Snoop's readers are busy-bodies who want lurid, exaggerated details.

2. Personality—a weekly magazine which reports on the lives of important people. Readers are "average" Americans who enjoy reading chatty, casual, informally written articles.

3. New York Chronicle—one of the country's most respected daily newspapers. Articles for this paper are usually factual, not emotional. Readers are well-educated, mostly upper class Americans.

BLANK (B): KIND OF STORY

In general there are three kinds of untold stories you can write. Choose one by selecting 1, 2, or 3 below and copying that information in the blank marked (B) on your TASK SHEET. This selection will help you to control your story once you begin writing it. (NOTE: Be sure that your choice is consistent with

the character you're writing about. You couldn't,
for example, pick #3 below for a character who died
at the end of the book you read.)

1. Some previously unknown facts about the
background of this character (including events
which happened before the beginning of the book
you read).

2. Something previousl.  .known about this
character's involvement with one or more of the
events in the book you read.

3. Something which has happened to this
character since the events reported in the
book you read.

4

## MORE INSTRUCTIONS

Now that you know the details of your task, it's time to get started! Follow these steps:

Step 4: Review
Before you write anything, put your heads to-gether and review the story of your character in the book named on your TASK SHEET. Also discuss the character briefly—his/her strengths, weaknesses, interests, etc. You might want to take notes on scratch paper.

Step 5: Create
Now the hard work begins. Invent an imaginative "untold story" about your character, one that you think will be of interest to the readers of your publication. Be sure to create the kind of "untold story" you selected for Blank (B) on your TASK SHEET.
Start with what you know about this character from the book you read, and then let your imagina-tions go. Your story should fit the personality of your character, but it should also be clever and original. Take notes on scratch paper if necessary.

Step 6: Publishing Format
Once you have an idea for your story, there is one more thing you should do before you write it out. Look over the last page of this packet to see what the final draft of your story will look like. DO NOT WRITE ANYTHING ON PAGE 6 RIGHT NOW. THIS FORM IS ONLY TO BE USED FOR YOUR FINAL DRAFT.
Notice that the name of your publication will appear at the top of your page and that your story will have to have a headline. Also notice that your article will include a picture. (More on that later.) Estimate how much you'll be able to write on the two columns of lines so that you'll know approximately how long to make your story.

Step 7: Write!
Write out a rough draft of your story on scratch paper. (Probably the best way to do this as a group is to have someone write while the rest of the group suggests details and sentences.) Rewrite if necessary. Revise.

Now think up a clever headline for your article. At the same time, have the "artist" in your group make a few practice drawings for your story's picture. (This picture might be a "photograph" of your character, a scene from his/her untold story, etc.) Be imaginative.

Step 8: Publishing Instructions
Follow these "publishing" instructions to complete pages 5 and 6. Work carefully.

Page 5: Under "From", print carefully the names of your group members. Then write the name of your character and the headline of your article on the lines at the bottom.

Page 6: Print the name of your publication and your headline in the spaces at the top of the page. Then neatly copy your story on the two columns of lines. (It must fit on this one page!) Have your artist copy his/her masterpiece in the box in the right column. Print a caption for the picture in the narrow rectangle under it.

CONGRATULATIONS! YOU'RE DONE! TURN IN EVERYTHING (INCLUDING NOTES AND ROUGH DRAFTS) TO YOUR TEACHER.

5

MEMORANDUM

DATE_____

To:   The Editor

From:   Names of Group Members

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

MESSAGE:

Here is the "untold story" article about
_____ which you requested
   (character's name)
for today's edition.  We hope you'll agree that it
is a fantastic piece of journalism.  We have titled
it _____
              (your headline)
_____.

86

|  |  |
|---|---|
| **6** | |
| (name of publication) | |
| date: | |
| (headline) | |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
|  |  |

89

# CLUSTERING FOR READER RESPONSE TO CREATIVE WRITING

Patricia L. Schatteman, Boone County High School, Boone County, Kentucky

In the past decade, peer response to literature has received considerable attentior in professional journals and publications. Alternatives to the more traditional instructional responsea have been suggested. Works by Bleich (1975), Rosenblatt (1978), and others have shifted emphasis from simple rec.ll and retrieval of textual information to individual perception, interpretation, and interaction with the printed page. Applying this reader-response theory to a specific method of evaluation can result in valuable classroom learning. The purpose of this article is to discuss the use of "clustering" as a method for eliciting reader response through peer evaluation of creative writing.

Clustering is an organizational atrategy meant to aid comprehension. A cluster is a conceptual configuration that shows the relationship of ideas. Rico (1978) employs the clustering strategy to comprehend a work of art. She suggeata that the reader uses this configurational process to achieve intelligent reconstruction. The reader moves from the whole to the parts to a fuller understanding of the whole. The reader explores, changes, and confirms or denies hypotheses about the selection by building and elaborating on a central impression. Rico suggests that the cluatering strategy "acknowledge(s) the perplexity of the knower and the complexity cf the reading experience" (p. 46) while the reader determines non-literal meaning.

This strategy for respending to a work of art corresponds closely to Bleich's (1975) three-phaae heuristic for developing reader response. Bleich has the reader write

extensively about what has been read. The written response develops from perception (what the reader sees) to affect (what the reader feels about what is perceived) to association (why the reader feels that way). The emphasis is on the individual and the unique, personal meaning re-created in the comprehension process.

This response process with the use of the clustering strategy begins once a student author has written a poem or short story. The peer responder is asked to read the selection. Upon completion of the reading, the responder writes, in the center of a sheet of paper, a word or impression derived from the work, without looking back at it. This emergence of a focus is similar to Elbow's (1973) center-of-gravity idea in writing and the initial phase of Bleich's perception stage.

## Student Sample

### Sisters

We are three in one.
Parts of each other;
Yet, unique in some special way.
Though we were born of the same parents,
Who were themselves individuals,
Yet joined.
We do not have the same values,
Share the same beliefs,
Or think the same way.
We are closely bonded;
Yet, at times
We could be no farther apart.
We are sisters;
Three in one.

## Central Impression

( Family ties )

The reader then returns to the selection to locate specific words and phrases that relate to and help create the central impression. As in Bleich's perception stage, the words and phrases support what the reader sees. These words are written . in circles at the ends of spokes emanating from the center circle.

89

91

## Text Support for the Central Impression
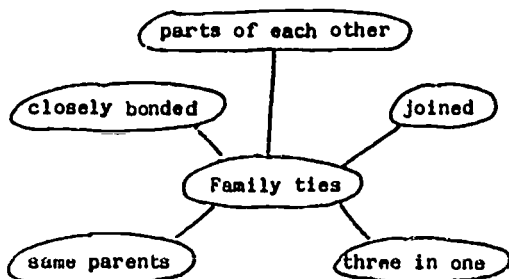


The next step asks the student responder to add personal words and phrases further supporting the central impression. The text would not be consulted since the student is analyzing individual background and indicating personal connections to the literary work, not unlike the affective response of Bleich's heuristic. These responses are placed at the end of longer spokes.

## Personal Connections to the Central Impression
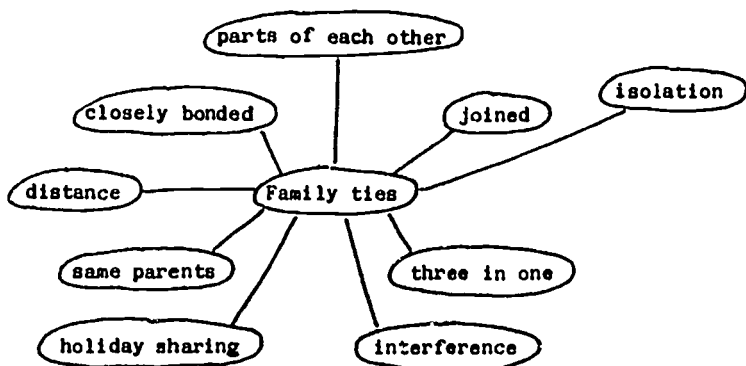


The procedure can then be repeated with the same responder reclustering around another dominant impression. This second response allows the reader to reflect further, possibly discovering additional interrelationships and resulting in a more refined response and a deeper understanding.

To this point, the clustering activity has been an aesthetic experience for the reader. By subsequently sharing the cluster configurations with the student author, an associative dialogue can occur. The author has an opportunity to see the effect of the work on an audience in a meaningful (interpretive) rather than judgmental ("I liked it") and often meaningless context. The author is able to assess the readability of the created work in terms of the reader's personal response. Discussion of the interpretation can provide opportunities for Bleich's third stage, association, when the writer and the responder discuss the reasons for the reader's reactions and the perhaps very different intended meaning of the author. Re-examination, questioning, revision, shifts in emphasis, and a better final product are often the result of this extended and valuable discourse.

In a recent article, Petrosky (1982) suggests that "we need...to share, read, and comment on each other's written responses if we are to understand ourselves as readers and writers..." (p. 20). Providing the student responder with a definitive and effective procedure for evaluation of another student's creative writing can contribute to developing insight for both pupils involved. The writer and the reader have a basis for extended dialogue and gain an in-depth understanding of themselves and the numerous aspects of the meaning-making process.

## References

Bleich, David. <u>Readings and Feelings, An Introduction to Subjective Criticism.</u> Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975.

Elbow, Peter. <u>Writing Without Teachers.</u> New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1973.

Petrosky, Anthony. "From Story to Essay: Reading and Writing," <u>College Composition and Communication,</u> February 1982, 33, 19-36.

Rico, Gabrielle Lusser. "Reading for Non-literal Meaning," <u>Reading, The Arts and the Creation of Mean ng,</u> E. W. Eisner, ed. New York: National Art Education Association, 1978.

Rosenblatt, Louise. <u>The Reader, The Text, The Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work.</u> Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978.

94

# THE WRITER, THE READER, THE POEM:
## AN INQUIRY APPROACH TO POETRY

Denny T. Wolfe, Jr., Old Dominion University

One summer afternoon, a young agricultural agent drove his dusty, government-owned vehicle down the dirt road which led to a large farm-house about a mile from the main highway. Stopping near the house, he emerged from his car and sauntered up to the front porch. There in a swing sat the old, retired owner of all the surrounding farm-land. "Howdy," said the agent. "I've come to tell you how to get some better crop yields." The old gentleman leaned forward in his swing, studied the pipe he was fingering, and rejoined, "Well, young feller, it's like this. I don't farm now half as well as I know how to."

The old gentleman's point of view toward farming is sadly similar to the view many teachers hold toward poetry. Many of us don't teach poetry now half as well as we know how to. How to teach poetry well is a matter our profession largely ignored through the first half of this century. Mary Graham Lund wrote in 1952, "There are few teachers who have success with teaching poetry. We can find about forty reports of experiments in educational magazines every year since 1929."[1] Between 1952 and 1982, happily, we can find reports of considerably more than forty experiments per year in the teaching of poetry; however, compared to other genres, poetry still receives scant attention in the secondary school classroom. Why is this so?

In the fall semester of 1981, I offered a graduate course at Old Dominion University called "Teaching Poetry, Grades 7-12." More than twenty secondary school English teachers signed up. On the first night of class, I asked, "Why are you taking this course, anyway?" I was surprised to hear several

say something like the following: "I'm taking it because,
frankly, I've never really liked poetry myself, so I tend to
avoid it in my classroom. I'd like to change my feelings about
it ao I can teach it better." My eclectic rendition of these
teachers' reeponses has several severe implications. First,
the teachers' educations (college majors in English, mind you)
had somehow failed them. Second, it's no wonder that, as
William Ojala has noted, "...poetry is the second most disliked
subject of the English classroom for most students (only
grammar seems to be disliked more)."[2] And third, the capacity
which poetry has to teach and to delight, to amuse and to
inspire, to calm and to arouse is going largely untapped in
contemporary society. But there is also at least one hopeful
implication in the teachers' responses. They _want_ to like
poetry, and they _want_ to teach it well. I believe, too, that
students can be led to care about poetry, and that they can
"learn" it well.

It is with that conviction, then, that I offer the fol-
lowing approach to teaching poetry. It's an approach which
places the student—not the teacher and not the poem—at the
center. The approach might be illustrated by the following
diagram, with an explanation afterwards:
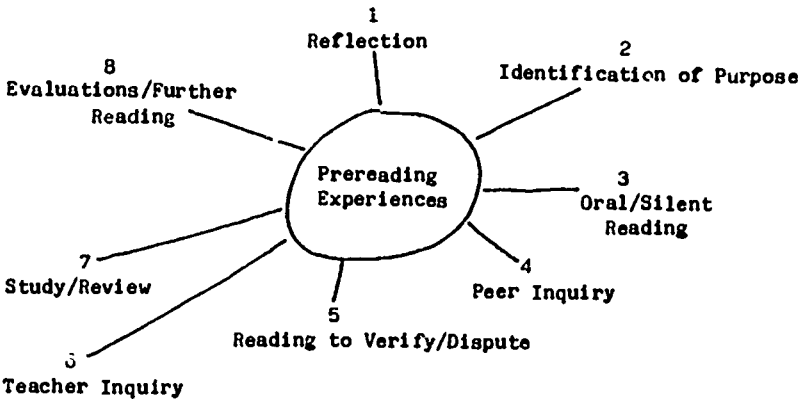
At the core of this approach is the <u>prereading experience</u>—a stimulus, a way of preparing students to read the poem, a way of generating a sense of anticipation. The territory to explore for effective prereading experiences is vast, certainly, limited only by an unwillingness to look, to listen, to reason, and to imagine. As an example, let's say that I wish to teach the poem "Citykid," by R. Baird Shuman, a poem which has been anthologized in secondary school literature textbooks. As a prereading experience—and as a <u>writing</u> way into reading—I might say to students, "When you think of the city, what images come to mind? Make a list of things you associate with the city." After a few minutes, I might say, "Now make a list of things you like most about the city. It's O.K. to use items from your first list." Again after a few minutes, I say "Now, make a third list of images or items you do <u>not</u> like about the city." Following this final list, I ask students to study all three of their lists for a moment (here begins the reflection phase—the elements in the approach I have diagrammed are recursive, i.e. they go back and forth; no lock-step sequence is intended). At this point, I ask students to place before them clean sheets of paper and, in the left margins of the paper, number the lines consecutively, 1-5. On corresponding lines, I ask them to answer the following questions, using only single words or phrases in their responses.3

Line 1: What is your favorite image in the city?

Line 2: How might you describe this image? Consider such qualities as color, shape, height, width, weight.

Line 3: What might your image do in a heavy wind?

Line 4: How might your image look on a really dark night?

Line 5: What object, time, event, feeling, or person does your chosen image remind you of?

After this exercise, I say to students, "Look at your answers. Try to rewrite what you have written as a poem. You already have a good start. Change whatever you want to, or feel you have to, in order to make your finished product look like a poem—a five-line poem. Use whatever punctuation you wish." Most students seem to have little difficulty with this exercise. Nearly all of them can create poetic "structures" this way. Two which I have collected from initially skeptical students are these:

95

A bridge
Gray, angular, long
Defying force
Stark reminder on a dark landscape of
Lonely times

Pigeons —
Oily necks, tiny heads, stiff struts;
Riding a harsh wind and
Flashing white against a spangled sky —
Cold night in the city

Great poetry, good poetry, bad poetry?  Such questions
here are unimportant.  What we are after in this case is a
way into a poem for study.  Such exercises are merely that—
exercises.  Admittedly, poetry written in this fashion might
not portray an "honest" picture of the creative process.  Few
(if any) poets—contemporary ones, at least—create poems by
playing the kind of game I have described.  Other games maybe:
looking out (carefully and intently), looking in (to explore
one's responses to what is "out there"), letting it flow out,
and making are phrases which get more nearly close to an
accurate description of the creative process than any pre-
fabricated exercise might.[4]  Nevertheless, for our purposes
here, the exercise has merit, I maintain.

At this point, I invite students to reflect on their
efforts.  Sometimes I ask them to exchange their work with one
or more other students, both to provide an audience and to
pursue the process of revision.  Inviting volunteers to read
their writing to the class almost invariably results in many
raised hands and many enthusiastic responses.  No one is to
serve as severe critic of the poems which are read aloud.  This
isn't really a harsh session on identifying and correcting
flaws, after all.  Finally, I'm ready to say:  "Before I pass
out copies of this poem, tell me what subject you expect it to
be about."  A chorus very often responds, "The city!"  The
reflection phase continues.

## Citykid[5]

They took the boy out of the city
But no matter how they tried
They could not wrest the city magic
From the boy.

He looked at trees and rushing streams
And in them saw reminders of light posts
And teams of people flooding into subway stops
At half past five.

They told him he must walk in wooda through autumn
    gold,
That he must learn to hunt and fish to be a man
But he had hunted, fished for coins through gratings
And walked in autumn woods at ten or twelve
When people prowl the streets to make seductions,
When eyes peer in the darkness avidly like Rousseau's
    tigers*
And hands stroke body parts bound tight in clothes.

The boy was made to feel he was wrong
And they were right.
For, with them, there was no middle ground,
Just right and those who did not fit its mold:
The boy, enduring now in their good hands
The punishment, the soul starvation
Of a rehabilitation
Out of town.

_____

*Rousseau's tigers:  French painter Henri Rousseau,
most famous of the "primitive" painters recognized
by modern art history.

With two questions, I identify our purpose for reading
this poem together.  "When I read this poem aloud to you, keep
these questions in mind:  What attitudes toward the city does
the poem express or suggest?  How do the images in this poem
compare or contrast with yours?"  After students hear the oral
reading (a good oral reading, we hope), they read the poem
silently and reflect on the questions.  Presumably, many of
them will begin to see, minimally, that "they" in the poem do
not feel the city is a healthy place for "the boy."  On the
other hand, "the boy" likes the city and feels that his forced
removal from it is a kind of "soul starvation" for him to
endure.  Identifying these two attitudes calls for little
inference-making ability; primarily, a "plain sense" level
of comprehension is what is required.

Next, in the peer inquiry phase, I divide students into
several groups (typically, four or five per group) to discuss
the purpose for hearing and reading the poem.  I insist that
they limit their discussion firs; to the questions about

attitudes. When everyone in each group has had his/her say, I
ask the students to talk about the second question--how the
images in their poems relate to the images in "Citykid."
Again, each person per group must have a say. Obviously, some
students will be able to identify clear similarities and
differences between their images and those of "Citykid"; some
will not. Often, however, the discussions begin to ricochet
in several different directions. Students begin to probe into
other elements of the poem, and this happens without teacher
intervention.

After disbanding the groups, I ask students individually
to read the poem silently again to _verify_ or to _dispute_ their
own ideas or those expressed by others during the group dis-
cussions. Even if there were no significant disagreements
among group discussants, another reading of the poem can serve
to solidify, to expand, to sharpen the original purpose for
reading. But in this reading, many students go far beyond the
original purpose to other realms of comprehension or confusion
about the poem.

In the _teacher inquiry_ phase, I begin by asking students
if they have questions they would like to raise for discussion.
Some usually do, and I invite other students to answer before
I do. I attempt to maintain a spirit of inquiry by making my
answers tentative--as they usually are, anyway. Depending
upon how the discussion goes, I suggest these additional
questions (others certainly could be asked):

   (1) Is there a "story" in "Citykid," expressed or
   suggested?

   (2) How does "the boy" feel about being in the country?
   How do you know how he feels? Why does he feel a; he
   does? How can you tell?

   (3) Who do you think "they" are in the poem?

   (4) Is there any irony in the poem? What is irony,
   anyway?

   (5) What qualities would you assign to "they" in the
   poem? Are "they" bad? Good? What can you say about
   them?

   (6) How about "the boy"? What qualities would you
   assign to him?

98

When the discussion has wound down, I ask students to study and to review the poem on their own. They should focus on questions. Do they still have some? And they should review the various points-of-view, speculations, and comments which came up during their earlier readings, their group discussions, and the whole class discussion. Perhaps some class time might be allowed for this phase, or students can study and review the poem and the accompanying discussions elsewhere and on their own.

Finally, students might be led to other poems about the city—or to poems on other subjects. Such an activity as this often encourages further reading. But, if evaluation is necessary (formal testing, that is), this approach has given students ample opportunities to comprehend a poem rather fully. And, perhaps most important, the overall approach has helped students see that they need not be intimidated by poetry. Such a student—centered mode of instruction can help make poetry more than palatable—it can help make poetry a medium through which students can learn how to learn.

## Notes

[1] "The Teaching of Poetry," School and Society (September 20, 1952), p. 182.

[2] "On Teaching Poetry to Secondary School Students," Journal of English Teaching Techniques (Winter 1972-'73), p. 23.

[3] What this exercise permits students to do is write an impression, or mood, poem. For a variation of it, as well as other such exercises, see Charles Duke's Teaching Literature Today (Portland, Maine: J. Weston Walch, 1979), pp. 168-205.

[4] Jane Ellen Glasser, a poet-in-the schools in Virginia, suggested these phrases in a presentation to the fellows of the Tidewater Writing Project, Norfolk, Virginia (July 1982).

[5] This poem appears here by permission of the author and of the National Council of Teachers of English.