The Student Writing Anthology
2012-2013

University of Massachusetts Amherst
Writing Program

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INTRODUCTION

With each iteration of the UMass Amherst Writing Program’s *Student Writing Anthology*, we continue to move closer to realizing our ultimate vision for the text: to make this book a campus-wide resource, used at every level, as an integral part of the University’s effort to both celebrate and improve student writing on campus. This 36th edition of the book also marks the thirtieth anniversary of the university’s Writing Program. Today, just as thirty years ago, this book demonstrates the respect for and importance of student writing that was built into the core of the Writing Program’s curriculum. It is also fitting that we celebrate the continued success of the University Writing Program by including texts from courses envisioned as integral to the teaching of writing at the UMass Amherst Campus: our First Year Writing courses, *Basic Writing* and *College Writing*, as well as texts from Junior Year Writing—a revolutionary feature of our program—then and now.

The book has changed greatly over the years. It began its life as an in-house, desk-top publication, created each semester with about 10 – 12 essays selected from first year courses. Along the way, it became a yearly publication, but still essays were not identified by course or unit. Now it is a professionally published book with separate sections for *Basic Writing*, *College Writing*, and texts from Junior Year Writing courses. Up until 2005, we only had a few sets of printed texts available for teachers to bring into their classes. Now, every student of *Basic* and *College Writing* has a copy of this required text. We have seen enthusiasm grow among our junior-year colleagues, with an increasing number of excellent submissions every year. And teachers in our 111 and 112 classes often comment on how valuable the first- and junior-year texts are to their teaching. Various calls and requests from Junior Year Writing instructors indicate that they too
might make use of the texts that are published. W.E.B. Du Bois Library also requests copies.

This book promises to be our most exciting edition to date. The contributions from *Basic Writing*, a complex course that fulfills a diversity requirement because of its emphasis on issues of US linguistic diversity, always offer crucial insights into this increasingly important issue. Students read and write about the numerous literacies through which they negotiate their worlds, as they examine how these literacies contribute to identity construction. The excellent writing from this course asks us to consider how various efforts to normalize these multiple literacies lead to the oppression of some identities and discourse communities at the expense of others. Such essential considerations of language, education, culture, and the values of our society must engage all of us.

As with last year’s book, the section devoted to *College Writing* includes examples of texts from our fourth unit, called the “TBA” because each of our teachers composes a unique project based on his or her personal strengths and interests. Many extraordinary projects emerge in Unit Four, and often include collaborative writing, experimental approaches to academic writing, and many other unique projects, such as taking an earlier assignment and “remediating” it in some way. Often, collaboratively written and edited books are created for community outreach as well as college audiences. These TBA assignments are as diverse and intellectually stimulating as the teachers and students who create them—their content and style reach across disciplines and class level.

We have again included examples of our fifth paper called “The Final Reflection.” Throughout the course students reflect on various aspects of their drafting, revision process, and the final product of their work. In the “Final Reflection,” which comprises the major part of *College Writing*’s final exam, students look back over the whole body of work they have produced in the course, consider their struggles and successes, then synthesize into one paper what they believe are the most salient lessons they will carry with them from the course. These papers offer sound and reflective advice and insight to any writer. They are so creative, entertaining, and informative, I can barely restrain myself from sharing some “pre-publication” copies with my current students.
Our Junior Year section also contains texts that offer us a remarkable range of topics and genres. From a research paper on a virtual choir with over 185 voices, to a review of photographs of apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa, to a literature review prepared for an original research project on gender and sporting goods marketing, this section offers a multiplicity of lessons about current trends in academic research across the disciplines. (More detail about these selections will come in the introduction to the Junior Year Writing section.)

I remember last year, as I read through the final page proofs for the 2011-2012 book, feeling amazed at the polished text and depth of thought evinced by these young writers. It struck me that many of the texts would not look out of place in an anthology of works by professional authors, and I felt that in some ways, calling the work “student writing” was inappropriate. But taken from another perspective, the fact that it is thinking and writing produced by authors still very young, with so many more opportunities to develop their knowledge and talents, makes the reading that much more enjoyable, and, at times, astonishing.

We invite our readers to discover the many rhetorical choices available to us in academic writing, and to learn from the wealth of ideas and experiences that emerge from each writer’s personal context. Finally, we hope our readers will enjoy the excellent work produced by our UMass Amherst students.

Patricia Zukowski
Chair, Anthology Committee

Assistant Director
University Writing Program
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to so many people who made this book possible: the First Year Writing instructors who contributed their students’ excellent texts to the Anthology (far too many names to recognize here), and all the students who eagerly agreed to share their work so that others might learn from it; the junior year professors, lecturers, and Teaching Associates/Assistants who shared our vision for this book and worked so hard to make the Junior Year section a reality: Laura Holland, Elizabeth Krause, Erinn Kynt, Joya Misra, and Anna Strowe. Their enthusiasm for this project, their willingness to do whatever needed to be done, were constant reminders to me of how fortunate I am to work at an institution filled with people who care deeply about students, their learning, their success, and, in particular, their writing. The efforts of our Anthology Committee members were extraordinary. Throughout the entire 2011-2012 academic year, they were fully engaged in every task that it takes to put this exciting book together. Every week, they diligently picked up a new packet of 25 – 40 papers, and read them intensively and attentively as they scored and commented on each one. We met every Friday afternoon to thoughtfully, thoroughly, and spiritedly discuss each text that had been submitted to us. They also helped with the long and tedious process of editing and putting the book together, then graciously kept offering to do more if needed. These volunteer graduate student committee members, Shastri Akella, Thomas Hopper, Katelyn Litterer, Sarah Magin, and Jenny Mar, showed graciousness and dedication throughout the entire process. Our sixth member of the committee, Deirdre Vinyard, Deputy Director of the Writing Program, also deserves special recognition. She not only served on the Anthology Committee but also chaired a separate Basic Writing committee that selected and edited all the essays from that course.
Not one step of this process would have gone forward without the extremely competent, dedicated, and enthusiastic assistance of our project assistant, Cara Cusson. From transcribing ALL the information from the submission forms onto a spread sheet, to Xeroxing the essays, and creating reading batches (both paper and electronic) for each committee member, to recording all scores and decisions, this extraordinary undergraduate student took on this project with as much vigor as if it were her own full-time work, while also attending to her responsibilities as a full-time student and Writing Program office assistant. Cara was as professional and adept as any permanent staff member, and needless to say, she exceeded in her efforts on all fronts. Special thanks to Haivan Hoang, Director of the Writing Program, for sharing and supporting the vision for this text and always offering to help with whatever was needed. Finally, I wish to thank Pearson Custom Publishing for agreeing to publish this book and bundle it with UMass Amherst’s custom edition of Lester Faigley’s *Penguin Handbook*, a required text in first-year courses; through this agreement, all our first-year students have access to this valuable learning resource—also a required text in both Basic and College Writing.

Patricia Zukowski
Chair, Anthology Committee
PART I

BASIC WRITING
Part I

Introduction to Basic Writing

This collection of essays represents some of the excellent writing done by students in the Basic Writing course (English Writing 111) during 2011. Basic Writing here at the University of Massachusetts Amherst is a prerequisite for College Writing for some students and also grants US Diversity credit. In this course, students read and write about the myriad literacies by which and through which they negotiate their worlds and how these literacies contribute to identity construction. In Unit I, students explore their own literacy histories, producing an essay on an aspect of their own practice, either past or present. In Unit II, they read texts which examine literacies from an academic perspective and then apply this lens to a home literacy, examining also the concept of a discourse community. In Unit III, the class examines literacies of power and how certain groups and institutions are supported and normalized by the language society forwards. In Unit IV, students examine educational literacies and how schools work to validate or deny certain literacies, identities, and discourse communities at the expense of others. The essays in this anthology represent important critical work on a topic of increasing importance to the students in this class, and indeed to us all.

This year, I worked with two Basic Writing teachers, Elizabeth Fox and Kelin Loe, to do the very difficult work of narrowing a large number of excellent submissions to the eight published essays in this book. I am appreciative of all of their hard work on this section of the Student Writing Anthology.

Deirdre Vinyard
Editor, Basic Writing Section
Deputy Director, University Writing Program
LEARNING AN UNSPOKEN LANGUAGE

Jill Montuori

Unit 1: My Reading, My Writing

In life we take many things for granted like food, shelter, people, and our own good health. Imagine living your life without the ability to read, not only written language, but also the world around you. Every second of every day we are reading and interpreting the world around us, and we do not even realize it. One of the most important aspects of reading is reading other people, and we use this to learn useful information like how they are feeling or if you can trust them. This summer my ability to read people was tested everyday at my job taking care of people who were developmentally disabled. The group of people I worked with had little to no survival skills like walking, talking, writing, or taking themselves to the bathroom. The golden rule that I lived by was “Just because I cannot say something does not mean I have nothing to say.” Many people would find it hard to communicate with someone who is non-verbal, but through this experience I learned that behaviors are a form of communication and the ability to read can be very beneficial in helping people who are unable to communicate through words.

On the first day of my job, I nervously walked in not knowing what to expect. I was scared of not knowing how to help my new friends who depended on me just to survive. To make things even more overwhelming, I was handed a 200 page data book about a man named Bienvenido, Ben for short. In Spanish Bienvenido means “welcome,” and this book welcomed me into the life of a non-verbal, non-mobile man who seemed to avoid human interaction. Through reading this book, I learned many things about Ben, his behaviors and his medical history. When helping Ben eat his lunch, I noticed that he often refused to drink fluids, and with dehydration being a constant problem for him, it was my job to get him to drink. When reading through his book, I learned that orange was his favorite color, and when presented with an orange liquid he was more likely to drink it. By switching the color of the drink I gave to Ben everyday...
for lunch, it made my job of getting him to drink much easier, simply because it was a color he liked. Being able to read Ben's data book on the first day of my internship helped me to get Ben to drink every day, which in the end helped him to stay hydrated and healthy.

Getting to know Ben extended past reading his data book and into reading his personality. By learning about his personality, I was able to know what kind of day Ben was having, noticing variations in his smile or facial expressions. Ben was not generally a friendly man, and he enjoyed spending time by himself, pushing people away who came close to him. Since Ben and I worked one-on-one, it was rare that he would push me away when I came close, and as time went on it seemed like he enjoyed my company. Ben would make it very clear what kind of day he was having, especially by pushing me away when I came close and throwing himself out of his wheel chair. Knowing Ben's personality, and realizing this was out of character for him, it helped me to figure out he was not having a good day. Many people find these behaviors to be peculiar, but when unable to tell us he was not feeling well, these variations in behaviors were the only way Ben knew how to communicate his message to us.

When we do not feel well, we often remedy our sickness by telling our doctor, or someone who comforts us. When unable to verbally tell somebody that you are not feeling well, it can be torture to sit there in the silence of your sickness. Since this was the case for Ben, I needed to look for signs of possible sickness everyday by looking at his body language and facial expressions. On a normal day for Ben, he would often sit up straight in his wheel chair, with a block in one hand and a toothbrush in another and he would be perfectly content. It was always clear that Ben was sick when he would lean completely forward in his chair with a look of distress on his face. On days like this, his favorite objects (his block and tooth brush) could not even wipe the frown off his face. When troubleshooting the possible causes of this negative body language, Ben would use a smile or a frown to tell us “yes” or “no,” and it was not until we asked him if he was not feeling well that there would be a relieved look on his face. Seeing this relief on his face put a look of relief on my face as well, and without my new ability to read body language, Ben's sickness would have gone unnoticed.
My internship was just one aspect of my life profoundly affected by my ability to read. I feel that without the ability to read, the human race would fail in communication, helping others and absorbing information. A world without reading would be a world without human interaction, and just because someone does not have the ability to read written language or communicate using words it does not mean they lack any ability to communicate at all. The many media through which we do these things make us all individuals and unite us as people.
LITERACY IN MY LIFE

Jenny Nguyen

Unit 1: My Reading, My Writing

The sun was just peaking over the horizon as I rubbed my tired eyes and flipped to one of the last few pages of my book. The time was 6:15 AM, and I could hear my father’s hard footsteps coming toward my room to scold me for staying up all night before he headed off to work. Books upon books ordered from the Scholastic Book Club lined the shelves of my desk, and more lay stacked by the night stand beside me. I might have looked like a nerdy little girl back then, but reading was my passion, or an obsession. I had not really figured out which one it was yet.

My mother was convinced that reading made me smarter by expanding my vocabulary and writing skills, so she never restricted the number of books I was actually allowed to buy. And I am grateful for that, but it broadened more than just that. My imagination stretched to impossible places.

Maybe my life was dull at the age of 10 or maybe I just wanted to block out my hovering family, but reading was my way to escape from the world. I was the protagonist in the fictional series trying to overcome her crumbling world all the while trying to get the guy in the end. And I was also the villain stealing to survive another day in the ghetto. Reading was a way to help me escape reality because it meant more to me than just some words on a page. It was a new experience each time I intertwined myself into a story.

I would not say that reading was what changed my life, but I think it helped shape the way I am today. As a young girl, and even today, I was struggling to find out my identity—who I really was in life and why I mattered to the world. It opened my eyes to many ideas and colorful opinions I had not encountered in the narrow-minded Catholic school I had been attending. I felt as though I understood more about the world and different types of people only because reading books helped me to truly read into things. There are people who read novels and there are people who read behind the words to find the message the author is trying to convey or the real story behind it. And that is me. Or that was me.
Much has changed in the past eight years, and I wish I held literacy with as great a meaning as I did back then. Reading was a private manner in which I used to express myself, and to me it was special. Today technology has replaced my precious books with a different way of reinventing me: through social media. I still enjoy reading now and then, but the time to pick up an intriguing novel is scarce for a college student who lives in a world with endless technology. Literacy in my life today is defined as logging onto Facebook, commenting on a friend’s new profile picture, and writing a short blurb in my status about how awesome life is when, in reality, it is not. It means picking up the cell phone to text my mom about how my day is going or surfing the web and reading meaningless articles on Perezhilton.com about Lindsey’s new rehab clinic. As I was obsessed with my written pieces of heaven—I have become engrossed in this new world as well.

In “The Language of Fakebook,” Katie Roiphe writes, “Facebook is the novel we are all writing….we all read ourselves.” This is true in a sense that Facebook was created for people to present themselves with personal information on a profile for others to see. Like all novels, the author gives clues and dialogue so that the reader gets a sense of the characters’ traits and development throughout the story. On Facebook, people, including me, try to display who we really are to the world, but what happens when half of the young Facebook population is still trying to find itself?

The answer is deception. Facebook has become a competition of who is more successful, who is happier, or even the extremity of how they are feeling at that very moment. There is nothing personal about it, but how we portray ourselves can become addicting. As sad as it is to say, I am a fakebooker—adding ‘lol’ to every comment to make things seem less serious or even the artificial “imissyou”s to a friend I have not seen in four or five years. Facebook could be my opportunity to show everyone in my life who I really am, but I have not reached that point in my life yet. So as I go back and forth from this fine piece of literature and my profile page I will continue to be the over-joyous college student everyone thinks I am.

Work Cited
A FOOTBALL POSTER—SIGNIFYING MUCH MORE THAN FOOTBALL

Sarah Fucci

Unit 2: Literacies Where They Live

After finishing my food and walking toward the dish return to return my dishes, I can smell all the different foods coming from the Franklin Dining common. I can see all the people waiting to also return their dishes and the workers behind the dish return getting angry that people are just throwing their dishes at them. As I’m standing there, smelling now the not-so-good smell coming from the dish return, I am just looking around waiting for my turn to come to put my dish on the conveyor belt. Of course, there are pushy people there who want to make their way to the front and I don’t fight with them because they have dishes full of food that could easily spill all over me, so I just let them go. With my wandering eyes, I notice a poster across from the dish return. This is an unusual poster because it is not one you would expect to see in a dining common. It has a giant football on it and says “Together We’re One.” This poster is representing the UMass Minutemen football team. Because UMass is a school with so much school spirit, to UMass students and faculty it makes sense that this poster is in the dining hall. This poster is an example of how texts can help create this kind of connection in a community. In the article, “The Ethnography of Literacy” John Szwed proposes five elements of literacy: text, context, function, motivation, and participants, and describes how these elements tie into the literacy communities that surround us every day (28). In this case, the literacy community being discussed is the Franklin Dining Hall at UMass Amherst.

For this specific poster, the context that it falls into is the dining common itself. However, looking at the bigger context, it could also be involved in the football field and campus activities because it is trying to advertise football so that people will attend and support their school.
When looking deep into this text, there are many things you can pull out of it when you compare it to its context. The main concept is the placement. Most people who walk by it probably think the same thing I do: “A football poster in a dining common on the other side of campus from the football field?” However, I believe there was strategy for putting this poster where it is today. With it being in this dining common, it is likely that many different types of people will be likely to see it and hopefully get involved with school activities. Also the way I see it, the placement of the poster ensures that everyone who goes to the dining common is very likely to see it because it is right across from the dish return and the exit, and therefore it is extremely visible to all students.

The main function of this poster is to help people understand that UMass is not segregated into groups of people and that everyone is one, together. The way UMass works is it involves everyone in everything, and there are many opportunities for students. This poster is made up of not only of an inspirational phrase but also a giant picture of a football. Another function of this poster is to get people involved in the school and with their football team, a major entity at UMass Amherst. Since this poster is very big and looks exciting, it catches people’s attention and makes them interested in the subject. By getting people interested in the subject of football, it helps to raise the spirit on campus and to get people excited for the events that go on here.

After eating, most people do not really have any motivation to read something unless it is interesting or they absolutely have to. Therefore, the motivation to read this poster can vary. A main motivation is that it is large enough that people can’t miss it so they just happen to read it as they walk by. Also students want to get informed about what is going on at school and by looking at this poster they can get informed about how football is a big deal on campus because it is advertised everywhere. For example, when I first saw that poster, I saw the giant football out of the corner of my eye and thought that it was strange that a poster for football was in the dining common. I decided to read it to see what it had to say about the football team because I know how big of a deal football is here at UMass. Another motivation for someone to read the poster may be for entertainment because they think the poster looks nice and it catches their eye. For
example, if there is a line at the dish return and they are waiting to return their dishes, they may notice it and decide to read it.

The participants (those who read the poster) could just be the people who go to the Franklin dining common to eat if talking about just this one specific poster. Also, the participant could be just yourself if you are the only one reading the poster and there is no one else there reading it with you. Sometimes I feel as though I am the only one who has noticed this poster because when I speak to my friends of it, they have no idea what I am talking about. But there are times where I do see other people reading it and so I know I am not the only one who has noticed this poster. Another example of who the participants could be is the whole campus. A reason for this is because it is very likely that this poster is at multiple places on campus, so where ever this poster is, if someone reads it no matter where they are on campus, they could be considered a participant. A reason why I assume this poster is at multiple places on campus is because since the Franklin dining common is not even close to the football field, I would imagine that this poster would be in locations closer to the field.

In conclusion, this poster shapes the way that I perceive the UMass community around me. I believe that through this one poster I can clearly understand the UMass community. The poster itself is very straightforward with not a lot of words and a very descriptive picture catching the eye of its passers. If I were a senior in high school coming on a tour of our UMass campus and I saw this poster, I would fully understand that UMass is a community of making people feel at home and feel as though this is where they belong. The one thing I remember from my tour here at UMass was when my tour guide said, “If this is where you belong, you will feel it by walking around campus and looking at your surroundings,” and by looking at that one poster, I would know this is where I belong.

Work Cited
made my first journey to America without any knowledge of the English language. My ability to communicate with any citizen who spoke English relied on vivid hand gestures; their clues were my only method of gauging what anyone was attempting to say to me. The English language translated in my brain as if someone was speaking with a mouthful of pasta and was unable to fully enunciate the words coming out of his mouth. No sooner had I started school than I was forced to learn English at its most basic. My brain was forced to reprogram, altering its perception of the English language. Words I normally would have pronounced the way I learned in Polish I had to think about how they should phonetically sound in English. Essentially, I had to alter the wiring of my brain in order to fully comprehend the change in language I encountered. I tried to embody the role of a developing newborn, attempting to ascertain the environment around it. I had to learn the English language with the unbiased nature of an infant. Deciphering different English words was torture, and weeks and weeks of tireless English schooling still did not yield the smooth transition from Polish to English that I so desired.

Upon walking into any basic convenience store, I would feel the population of the store fixate its eyes upon me in anticipation of what my foreign nature might bring. My heart rate would accelerate and my mind would struggle to process the onslaught of near incoherent thoughts that pounded against the walls of my consciousness. The inevitable rush of adrenaline pumped through my veins, and I very much embodied the emotion anxiety. My peers were initially friendly towards me, offering hand gestures to help me understand their comments. Soon they grew tired of the extra effort it took to communicate my wishes, and their cheerful smiles disintegrated into a scornful grimace. From their condescending actions to their disapproving nods, I could decipher their thoughts of my assumed inferiority. My stuttering and clumsy phrases would be met with a silencing gesture by the cashiers. My flustered attempt at explaining to
these cashiers my purpose for coming to the store would sometimes be understood, but far too often I gave up my feeble attempt at communication. Some cashiers would make jokes about my language barrier, while others attempted to drag out their amusement by feigning incomprehension. When met with such difficulties, I would either push forward to try and get what I pursued or I would run from the store.

I only found the need to run from the store I was in on one occasion. This store was the first one I explored after coming to America; this story depicts my first attempt at a purchase in America. While standing in the check-out line, I could not help but notice that the cashier gave off a condescending and mean disposition. He was working with a friend of his, and the two spent their shift laughing and whispering to one another whenever a customer would walk by. I felt my body shiver when I realized that I was the next in line. My heart rate increased by ten and I could feel the palms of my hands begin to sweat, no doubt a bodily response to terrible fear. As I approached the frightful cashier, he looked down upon me with the words “what do you want” burning in his eyes. When I opened my mouth to speak, no sound escaped my vocal cords. I stood still as a statue while my mind raced, desperately seeking a way to communicate with this human being. The cashier’s equally condescending friend looked at me and began to laugh, and the horrible realization that a fellow human being would act this way in my moment of pure terror hit me. A small hopeful thought, that the cashier could be laughing at something else, lingered in my mind. I focused on this thought and proceeded to try and get this transaction over with. Without thinking, words started to flow from my mouth in Polish. I attempted to use my hands to help communicate what I wanted, but both of the cashiers kept laughing at my expense. Their fingers pointed at me and they called me English names that my mind could not decipher. My self-esteem crashed as I was washed with feelings of failure and embarrassment. Any ego I had before had been annihilated. I felt my mind whir and soon the room around me began to spin. I felt faint and knew I had to escape this terrifying atmosphere. I could not stand there any longer so I ran out of that store with tears in my eyes. I ran and ran until my legs carried me to my temporary home many miles away. I ran
home in a trance which was not broken until I felt the sweet relief brought by my own home. I realized that I was running for the sake of running, that I did not actually need to escape the store I was in. I had allowed my fear to overtake my mentalities, which ultimately blocked my passing into the English language. My legs remained numb and tears continues to stream down my cheeks as I sat at that rented home and thought about why I ran from the English language.

After that terrible day at the convenience store, I made it my duty to spend hours and hours a day studying the English language. I vowed never to repeat my embarrassing fleeing from the convenience store that day. I resisted going outside for risk of distracting myself from my English studies. My nose would stay in books detailing the English language for hours on end, making up games and spending the whole day dedicated to mastery of the English language. Nearing the one year anniversary of that dreadful day when I ran from the convenience store, I returned to the site of that day with the purpose of purchasing a gift for my mom. A sign on the door caught my eye, and I noted that the store was taking employment applications. “Perhaps I should apply?” The thought flickered in my mind and I knew I had to apply for the job. I filled out the application and was contacted the very next day, told of a requested interview from the store’s manager. Attempting to impress the manager and show him that my foreign ways were deserving of this “most prestigious position,” I showed up to my interview clad in an impressive suit. I could tell the manager was impressed with my sophisticated disposition, aided greatly by my suit. The manager told me that his respect for an individual was derived mainly from a person’s style, and people like me with good style must know how to do their job well. This small gesture landed me a job at this convenience store, even though my English was not yet perfect.

I had been working at this store a week when I encountered an individual who was eerily familiar. I soon realized he was the very cashier who had caused me to run out of this store almost a year ago. I saw a flicker of recognition in his eyes, and knew he remembered me as well. I spoke to him with flawless English, and I could not help but feel a twinge of accomplishment when I saw his eyebrows raise in surprise. The man soon apologized to me for the way he tormented me a year earlier. I told the man,
“Don’t worry about last year. If it were not for you, I would not be here today.” He smiled at me, took his items, and left the store. Sometimes it is the times when we have adversity thrust upon us that we grow the most as individuals. Learning the English language could not have been possible for me if I were not motivated by the adversity people thrust upon me.
SURVIVAL OF THE UNNAMED

Debbie Lee

Unit 3: Languages That Rule

Now, where you sit in the cafeteria is crucial because you got everybody there. You got your freshmen, ROTC guys, preps, JV jocks, Asian nerds, cool Asians, varsity jocks, unfriendly black hotties, girls who eat their feelings, girls who don’t eat anything, desperate wannabes, burnouts, sexually active band geeks, the greatest people you will ever meet and the worst. Beware of The Plastics. (Mean Girls)

As an eighteen year old in the 21st century, it would be an understatement to say that I merely graduated from high school with an optimistic outlook on the “real life.” High school is supposed to prepare and shape teenagers to become young adults and eventually transform them into aspiring doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. However, how could any student even think about becoming a doctor, lawyer, or entrepreneur when we had our own lives to tend to. We needed to justify our own actions and advertise our own selves to be socially accepted. Eventually, the life of a high school student was more than just the survival of the fittest. It’s surviving high school unharmed, unscathed, and unlabeled.

Please come join me as I reminisce about the last few days I spent at Paramus High School. As a senior it was inevitable that I had authority, no questions asked, and even though I did not want to come off as superior, I was. My “Senior Class of 2011” t-shirt was self explanatory, I was to be respected, and not questioned by underclassmen. Just by choosing to sit in the Commons before and after school marked my place as an upperclassmen. “The Commons” has been traditionally known to be restricted to only upperclassman, and just by standing along the perimeter of the Commons, any underclassmen could tell this territory was off limits. I can honestly say when I was an underclassmen the most excitement happened in the Commons. It was a place all underclassmen desired to be a part of. It was where the jocks, the party goers, the sexually active, the pot heads,
the privileged, the gossipers, the meat heads, and the attention seekers would mingle and converse about pure nonsense. Yet, in the corners of the Commons, are the academically motivated, the followers, the eavesdroppers, the junior varsity members, the foreign exchange students, the eco-friendly activists, the musically talented, and these were the stories that were shared around inside the Commons.

The irony of the Commons is that physically it had the capability to bring the upperclassmen into unity; however, it’s nearly impossible not to place a label or name upon each other, which differentiates and divides everyone. In Wildman and Davis’s essay, “Making Systems of Privilege Visible,” they introduce the idea that “we all live in this raced and gendered world, inside these powerful categories, that make it hard to see each other as whole people” (102). And in the hallways, it is difficult not to see the girl who chose a guy over her best friends, the group of friends who should not be calling themselves best friends, the boy who received a 2400 on his SATs, the class clown who recently got suspended, and the couple that you know has more secrets that are better off untold. Naturally, we all have a mindset to visually differentiate people, and then place them into a category, and “each of these categories contains the images, like an entrance to a tunnel with many passages and arrows pointing down each possible path, of subcategories” (Wildman and Davis 102).

And these images and arrows help define and compose the stereotypes’ persona, characteristics, and status of privilege. And surprisingly, this particular status of privilege remains the same throughout majority of high schools. The voices against privilege never actually vocalize to mark a change, therefore, “where there is silence, no criticism is expressed. What we do not say, what we do not talk about, allows the status quo to continue” (Wildman and Davis 101). The system of privilege was present and visible particularly in my high school, but no one had enough courage to end the system or to publicly explain the high school complexity of privilege that just naturally happens. In the end, silence among all of us continues to allow, “the invisibility of privilege to strengthen the power it creates and maintains. The invisible cannot be combated, and as a result privilege is allowed to perpetuate, regenerate, and re-create itself. Privilege is systemic, not an occasional occurrence” (Wildman and Davis 101).
Even now, as a freshmen in college, I can admit that when I recollect the memories I shared inside Paramus High School classrooms, hallways, and even the Commons, the names and labels I nonchalantly placed on my fellow students still exist in my mind. As much as I make the effort to take away such labels they are consistent and constant inside my head. When I gaze through my yearbook and see the perfectly printed portraits of the Class of 2011, all 360 of us, I sometimes wish that maybe I or someone had the courage to combat this system and ridicule the labels we’ve given to each other. However, until someone raises a voice, the system of privilege in high school will remain present and will continue to name the unnamed.

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NO MATTER WHAT GENDER

Moa Mattson

Unit 3: Languages That Rule

I am a soccer player, I am a woman—thereafter I am called a woman soccer player. If I were a man, I would be a soccer player. Language and naming show that the norm of a soccer player is a man. I have played soccer in both Sweden and at college in the US, two countries where this privilege is a problem.

Wendy Kaminer discusses in “Let’s Talk About Gender, Baby” how our world is gendered and how that is reflected in our language. One of her examples is that the word woman is used as an adjective, “We have ‘women doctors’ and ‘women senators’ but no ‘men doctors’ and ‘men senators’ ” (130). On the other hand, there are “manservants”. Her conclusion of this is “Servants are presumptively female, just as senators are presumptively male” (130).

On the official soccer website in Sweden, there are elections for rewards for players who have performed well during the year. One of the categories is “Best soccer player of the year” and “Best woman soccer player of the year”. Using Kaminer’s words, soccer players are presumptively men.

I am a soccer player and seeing this bothers me. Like in most of women’s history, women soccer players have fought hard for being seen as athletes performing a sport and not beautiful objects running around on a field. Because I know how hard my role models have been fighting to be taken seriously, I see naming like “the player of the year” as an insult to them and the thousands of female soccer players today.

Kaminer is irritated over the use of the words sex and gender. She means that sex refers to the biological group men or women, while gender refers to “cultural norms of masculinity and femininity” (130). In other words, gender is what people think female and male should be and sex is what they biologically are. The pictures of what a man and a woman are create norms, whereas what is outside the norm is considered as different and sometimes subordinated. The picture of a soccer player consists of dominant male
qualities, so when a woman is a soccer player it has to be described with “the adjective” woman, to clarify that it is not exactly reflect our picture of a soccer player, which would be a man.

While Kaminer writes about the gender perspective of naming and language, Stephanie M. Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis discuss in “Making Systems of Privilege Visible” this in terms of privilege. In soccer, being a man is the norm and by that, they have a privilege compared to women. People assume that soccer players are men, and that is a privilege itself: not being questioned for what they are doing.

Wildman and Davis discuss the privileges in our society and the issues that come with them. One of these privileges is based on gender and language, “The use of ‘he’ as a generic pronoun, stated to include all people, but making women in a room invisible when it is used, is seen as a norm” (107). They suggest that using “she” instead of “he” would cause offense to many people, and explain that with “This emotion is not about the grammatically correct use of English, but about the challenge to the system of male privilege” (107).

Wildman and Davis also write about areas where they are privileged or subordinated themselves and what they do to visualize it. An example they point to is that they make sure they treat their women and men students equally (111). In my soccer example, I am subordinated as a female both by language and naming. An expression that I use as a soccer player on an everyday basis is “man on,” which means that the person who has the ball has a defender close to her/him. Since I almost solely play with females, this expression make no sense because it is more than likely a woman, and not a man, who is the defender close to the person with the ball. Wildman and Davis mean that “we are products of the culture that instills its attitudes in us”, and that might explain my behavior. However, similar to Davis and Wildman I am working on visualizing this privilege that men have in soccer. If I do not want to be called a woman soccer player, then I cannot call other soccer players “men” when they are not. Going back to the idea of challenging the system of male privilege, that is what I am striving for.

I have played soccer in both Sweden and in the US and when I compare my experiences of the standing of women as soccer players, I find both similarities and differences. The naming of the top divisions in soccer
shows near resemblance. The major league in Sweden for women soccer is called “Women’s Major League,” where the men’s is just called “Major League.” That is similar to the US where the top divisions are called Major League Soccer (MLS) for men and Women’s Professional Soccer (WPS) for women. Both countries are facing the same problem where the naming of the top divisions are affected by the norm they have of soccer players.

My experience from college in the US is that men and women are more equal than in Sweden when it comes to sports. The school provides the same resources and facilities for both genders’ teams and athletes, and the webpage does a good job of writing as much about women as men. In college, and probably the rest of the US, football is the biggest sport. Soccer is a lot smaller and that might be one reason why the media attention is more equal.

The organization that rules over college sport is the NCAA. They have a rule that says that women’s and men’s sports must have the same economic conditions. I think this is an example where those with power affect the equivalent standing of men and women.

The texts “Making Systems of Privilege Visible” and “Let’s Talk About Gender, Baby” show the connections between naming and social standards. These two texts strengthen my experience from being called a woman soccer player, where I am subordinated from a gender perspective.

I want a society with sex equality. To reach a society where men and women are equal, every step is important. If you think that a privilege is wrong, then I believe you should do what you can to change that. Language and naming are affected by privileges, and one of my actions to visualize them is to be aware of my language. Wildman and Davis write “A privilege is not a right” (105), and I agree. Being called a soccer player should be a right, no matter what gender.

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THE ZOMBIE APOCALYPSE

Giorgi Khachaturov

Unit 4: Unschooling Literacy

In “Making Systems of Privilege Visible,” Stephanie Wildman and Adrienne D. Davis explore the way systems of privilege dominate society. The majority has created a theory, a “norm,” by which they expect everyone to act, because they “gain many benefits by their affiliation with the dominant side of a power system” (106). This theory is a whole system that defines every detail of a “normal” human. People can get labeled abnormal if they deviate from the defined norms in categories like clothing, hobbies, religion, race, economic status, and even food preference. Eleanor Kutz supports Wildman and Davis, and expands on one of the categories – language and literacy. She starts off providing an example of a case where the privileged petition against having teachers with an accent because they are afraid that their children could adopt the accent and thus drop out of the privileged group (Kutz 136). She then discusses social norms in language and literacy and argues that there shouldn’t be any because language is a very personal thing and even the errors should serve as a key to understanding the person who makes them (Kutz 147).

The concept of “language and literacy” determining my social status has played out very well in my life. When I first moved to the US, I only knew a few hundred words of English, so my actual communicative ability was extremely limited. The first person I talked to at school, and the first teen I had to speak with in English, was some random guy in what I later found out was not my homeroom. I knew I had to be active in order to make new friends, so I said, “Hi, I’m George. What’s your name?” The guy turned around, smiled, and exclaimed, “Spencer! Whaddup, yo?” I had no idea what “whaddup, yo” meant, but I figured it was some kind of greeting. I told him I didn’t understand exactly what he said because I was new to America. His smile suddenly straightened out, and he said, “Oh, k,” as if he were disappointed. He then picked a seat four desks away from me, even though there were no other people in the room yet. I didn’t know what his
problem was at the moment, but it made me very self-conscious since I started to think that something was wrong with me. It is only now that I understand that there indeed was something wrong with me. I didn't speak English. I probably scored the lowest possible in the “language and literacy” category, which suddenly dropped my social status so low that Spencer preferred not to talk to me, despite no one else being in the room. But it doesn’t worry me since dear Spencer is officially a zombie of the system of privilege.

For my entire time in the US, I’ve met many kinds of zombies of the system of privilege. I figured the most dangerous zombies are the ones in power, the ones that have access to a linguistic weapon of mass destruction through television, newspapers, public education, and others. A notable example of such a zombie is my high school math teacher. When I was introducing myself during the first class, I mixed up the words in a combination that produced laughter across the classroom. At this exact moment I benchmarked my “language and literacy” category, and apparently wasn’t successful. I wasn’t doing well in her class because my knowledge of English severely limited my ability to understand math. When she called on me, I usually failed to give a coherent answer, unless it was something as simple as a number. She got intimidated by it and instead of helping me out by explaining things said something like, “who wants to help Giorgi out” or “wrong Giorgi, anyone else?!” Not only had she made me look impaired because I was pretty helpless even without her comments, but she also called my foreign name despite me asking her not to, which made me even more different and thus unprivileged. As a result, I made no friends in that class and had the worst grade, as she told me later. She never wanted to help me after school, so I had no one to study with, no language skills, and no motivation after all that has happened. Math became my most hated class. I wish I could ignore her by calling her a zombie, but her class affected my GPA and social status. She was simply too dangerous.

As you can see, the zombies of the system of privilege have affected my life in America and my adaptation to it in a very bad way. Contrary to the belief that I should remember my first years in America with joy, I would hate to think that such a long period of my life has been wasted on fighting the horrible zombies. It’s still not over— the zombies keep coming
back, but at least it’s easier now because I can fight them back with their own weapon, language.

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HOME LITERACY VS. EDUCATIONAL LITERACY

Woong Park

Unit 4: Unschooling Literacy

My Korean literature teacher at an international school told me an impressive theory about foreign language learning. Despite the fact that my teacher had experiences learning and studying English in the states, she told me, “If you want to be a fluent English speaker then you must be fluent in your mother language first. Otherwise, your knowledge will be limited.” On the other hand, most educational settings around the world ignore their students’ mother language and try to only focus on learning the standard literacy, which in multilingual children’s case in the U.S. is English. There are people who believe it is unnecessary to ignore the native language when learning a new one. In the essay “English-Only Triumphs, but The Costs are High,” Alejandro Portes mentions, “These trends raise the question of whether complete language assimilation—acquisition of fluent English and abandonment of native language—is desirable” (169). He explains the doubtful trend of when non-native English students learn, educational settings tend to ask them to abandon their mother tongues and build English on top of that; this causes conflict within a student’s mind. Thus, conflict arising between the educational literacy, English, and the home literacy, the native language, can have a tremendous affect on the academic performances of students. The examples from Maxine Hong Kingston and Eleanor Kutz’s essays will support this idea.

Forcing students in a situation to use “standard” literacy, English, can marginalize multilingual students and discourage them from improving their English. In the United States, ‘the norm’ is the one who possesses the standard literacy, English, and multilingual students, who speak other languages as their mother tongues, can be marked as outsiders. Not being able to join the norm or majority group, those multilingual students feel left
out. Therefore, when students from immigrant families, including Chinese, Mexican, Korean and people who do not use English as their first language, find themselves facing difficulties to get accustomed to a new language, they get frustrated and intimidated; this leads to discouragement of learning and improving English in educational settings.

As an example, Maxine Hong Kingston, a student from a Chinese immigrant family, talks about her frustration as an English as second language learner in her essay “Silence.” She states, “When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent…. I stand frozen, or I hold up the line with the complete, grammatical sentence that comes squeaking out at impossible length” (150). She illustrates her fears about speaking out loud in English and that she has to remain silent. Her fears get worse as she grows. “It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery. I did not speak and felt bad each time that I did not speak,” says Kingston about her grade school (152).

As a bilingual student who studies in an American university, I can totally empathize with Kingston. Often in my discussion classes or classes I have to participate with opinion, I have an urge to present my thoughts and share with my classmates; however it is very difficult to participate due to my limitation in language. Though I clearly understand the topic and have my own ideas, the language becomes the biggest barrier. Sometimes, after sorting my ideas in my mind, when I finally try to share them, the rest of the class has already moved on to another topic. I feel like the class is not giving me a space and chance to talk. Even after the class, I regret not spitting out my thoughts and sometimes condemn myself for it. The experience I had as well as Kingston, clearly explains how being forced to use English in an educational setting can alienate non-native English speaking students and cause difficulties in learning.

Also, not allowing students to use their mother tongue, even at home, is not only harmful for students, but rather limits their capability. Many of the immigrant families force their children to only speak English at school as well as at home in order to make them fluent and learn fast. People think if children use English all the time, it will provide them more opportunities to improve and eliminate their habit of using native language, which is
prohibited while learning English. Eleanor Kutz who introduces the idea of folk theories mentions this method of learning in the essay “Excerpt from Language and Literacy.” She states, “Yet, from recent research with bilingual children there is no evidence that speaking another language fluently at home is more harmful than speaking limited English for a child’s acquisition of English” (142). She presents the result disproving the folk theory, a false myth, that it is unnecessary for a child to speak only English. She also says, “it seems the children who have limited use of a first language at home are less likely to have the full linguistic foundation needed for full acquisition of other language” (142). It demonstrates the importance of maintaining the first language before children go on to develop any other language skills, because removing the mother tongue can limit their capability.

One of my personal experiences while attending the international school certainly supports Kutz’s ideas. A number of my friends who attended American boarding schools faced academic difficulties because they were only allowed to speak, think, and read English; using other languages, like Korean, was prohibited by rule. However, I was able to attend an international school in the Philippines, and so my circumstances were a lot different. Because it was an international school with a multi-national population, we were allowed to use other literacies, native languages, as a part of learning. For example, if I was writing a paper for my history class, I could brainstorm in Korean, jot down ideas on the paper, and attach it to my draft as the process of writing. Even for a first draft, it was okay to use some Korean words within the essay. Teachers in my school allowed students to use their native languages because, even though we had to write our final paper in English, it was still easy for some of us to think in our own language and transform that into English. This exemplifies the idea that not allowing students to use their mother tongue at home as well as at school does not help students to improve their English and rather limits their capability.

Then, how can we ease the conflict between the educational literacy, English, and home literacy, the native language, and make a better circumstance for students’ learning? As demonstrated by Maxine Hong Kingston’s experience and findings presented in Eleanor Kutz’s essay, both
supported by my personal experience as a bilingual, it is clear that the friction of English and mother language can influence students' academic performances and have negative outcomes. Thus, in my opinion, it is important to allow multilingualism as a part of education process, rather than to force students to only focus on English. It will be more beneficial for students to keep their mother tongue and build English on top of their asset. Using home literacy to acquire knowledge and educational literacy to express and display their idea could be one way of improving non-native English speaking students' academic performances and to have positive outcomes.

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PART II

COLLEGE WRITING
A philosophical tenet of the Writing Program, and of any writing community, is that writing exists to be read; writers must also be readers—readers of a large and diverse portfolio of works, texts, and genres. Among the important texts and works to be studied, one’s “self” is a text that absolutely must be read and re-read with great attentiveness for it serves as the foundation from which all future interpretation and interaction with texts can be built. In Unit I, students were given the opportunity to discover new insights about themselves. Through the process of writing, revising, receiving feedback from fellow writers, and re-writing, they were able to take on new perspectives of their own personal experiences. The essays created in this unit were written for a close, personal audience (i.e. fellow class members) and introduced key elements of the rhetorical situation (context, purpose, audience). In this essay, students are the ultimate authorities on the content about which they write.

The challenge to these writers was to look at their stories and their bodies as histories and to examine themselves as they would examine a text. In this way, they began re-seeing themselves through the lenses of larger contexts, and they investigated their experiences as the elements that have shaped them.
THE STORY OF THE WOODS

Brandon Agnew

Autumnal Tints

Flowers are but colored leaves, fruits but ripe ones. Our appetites have commonly confined our views of ripeness . . . to the fruits which we eat. Within our [own] towns there is . . . another show of fruits, on [a] grander scale . . . [fall leaves] which address our taste for beauty. (Thoreau 385)

We knew what was back there. We had walked around it a dozen times during gym class. There were trails laid around the Cranberry Preserve: trails that led you uphill through the woods or wound their way downhill to running tracks along muddy creeks. Some were made up of so much of sand they could be mistaken for trails to the desert. Others led to the reservoir that provided water to my small hometown on the south shore of Massachusetts. There were also trails that led to cranberry bogs, where, in the brisk New England autumns—when leaves turn into a Monet canvas, their painted surfaces distinct hues of red, yellow, or purple—Ocean Spray makes immense harvests.

The Cranberry Preserve provided ample trails for everyone, whether you were attempting a cross country practice or simply needed a path to walk your dog. The maps there were littered with white stains (I still don't know if they are from paintballs or accurately placed droppings from birds with grudges against the sign), sheds were run down, and streams were flooded with murky brown waters.

But what is a trail? A trail is just a beaten path to another destination. We knew people went back there to work; we knew that people who worked in town went up there on Fridays to blow off the stress of the week gone by; we had seen the older high school kids go back there to use chewing tobacco, too nervous to do it when driving.

The Cranberry Preserve was a job site or a brief escapade. People did not live for the moment when they were over there; they lived for the moment when they got out.
The Scarlet Oak

... this leaf reminds me of some fair wild island in the ocean ... At sight of this leaf we are all mariners, if not Vikings, buccaneers, and filibusters. Both our love of repose and our spirit of adventure are addressed ... This [leaf] is some still unsettled New-found Island. Shall we go and be rajahs there? (Thoreau 398)

I wondered about how many pieces my bumper had been shattered into when I first drove slowly down the path that led to the preserve. The road was as smooth as a safari, and the ride was just as uncomfortable—jerky as an old wooden roller coaster. To the right, there was a tiny shimmer of light from a television set in a house set far back into the woods: the last remnants of domestic civilization. Beyond that point there were only trees so tall that they created a dark tunnel that blocked out the moon. From the passenger seat, my friend Andrew told me to take a right at the upcoming fork in the road. Anxiety began to set in. What if the police were out here? What if they were mad that we came out here too? What if a criminal was out there?

With one more “clunk” and the splashing of water as I steered my wheels carefully through puddles left by bigger vehicles, I saw a clearing with faint moonlight glowing down on it. I was relieved. The clearing was not too large, but it was a sufficient parking lot for the preserve. To our left was a cranberry bog, a larger clearing where a half crescent moon struggled to illuminate the night.

I parked facing the bog to allow the moonlight to peer in through the windshield. From the backseat, I heard my friend Brian’s eager voice telling me to shut the engine off. We sat for hours in silence, conversing only on occasion, allowing music from the car’s CD player to flow in and out of our ears. Every breath I drew filled me with the herbal scent of damp leaves and twigs. The night was alive with the sounds of cicadas.

Slowly, I discovered the actual reason behind my initial anxiety, all those worries about the police and hardened criminals. I had, until that night, lived only for outcomes: I wanted nothing but good grades, to win games, and to get paid. I lived an ultra-structured lifestyle to realize my ambitions, working at two jobs, doing sports practice six days a week, and spending a
great deal of my time planning out my future. For the first time in my life, I had ventured into a drive whose purpose was to do nothing but to live in that moment. My initial reactions, I saw, were my way of resisting an experience.

I started to relax. There was a certain beauty I found in slowing down, in spending time at that place that wasn’t a place but just a spot. We called it “The Spot.”

We started to frequent the place, going there every time we wanted to experience life in slow motion, without a schedule that compartmentalizes our hours into neat thirty or forty-five minute slots. Over there, time seemed to flow with the freshness and freedom of river waters. We always returned from what was practically our backyard having acquired, in a span of hours, this feeling of rejuvenation that belongs to exotic summer holidays at spas. I realized why vacations are such unwinding experiences: they distance our minds from all the planning and retrospective thinking we do during the course of our daily lives. By placing ourselves in a new city or town, we inhabit the present fully, absorbing the new experiences surrounding us.

Almost every trip was an epiphany. Over the course of these nights, we learned a lot about each other—speaking as we did about friendships, relationships, family, movies, music, and whatever else crossed our minds. But most importantly, we learned about ourselves. I realized that being popular is not important, and that sometimes, I, along with my two friends, were wet puzzle pieces, designed to fit in, but too stubborn to do so.

**Fallen Leaves**

By the sixth of October the leaves . . . begin to fall, in successive showers . . . some trees, as small hickories, appear to have dropped their leaves instantaneously . . . down they have come on all sides, at the first earnest touch of autumn’s wand, making a sound like rain. (Thoreau 391)

At one point during the winter of my senior year of high school, I approached an all-time low: my grades were slipping and I was losing friends from my basketball team as we began sputtering out of control as a squad. I got into one too many altercations with two other team captains,
both of whom I thought of as extremely good friends. This all led up to the
night after a devastating loss to a rival team. I sat quietly in the locker room
while the other players continued to gallivant around as if we had just
made the playoffs. Lockers, posters, shoes, and even our jerseys, all red,
would paint the perfect scene for the fiery altercation that could have
broken out. Words could have become pushes, pushes become shoves, and
shoves become blows. To avert this possibility, I walked away quietly.

With Brian and Andrew alongside, I drove to our secret area of serenity.
To The Spot. No word of the game was spoken. No word of basketball was
spoken. The winter cold was yet to set in. There was no fog obstructing my
view of the moon which was, I noticed, unusually low. I watched moon-
light give the trees a gilded coating. I breathed the cool fresh air of the
place, drawing in the scent of wet twigs, just as strong as on my first visit
to The Spot. I let the calm of the place wash over me. I stood independent
of my loss. The moon started to turn faint as the night sky paled slowly
into a light blue. The sounds that mark the beginning of mornings started
to fill the air. When driving back home, I decided on meeting my coach
to sit with him and work out a practice schedule that would make us
stronger players. I thought it paradoxical that a place of transience, where
everyone comes to drive away, had offered me the space where I could learn
how to live in the moment.

*The Sugar Maple*

The autumnal change of our woods has not made a deep impression on
our own literature yet. October has hardly tinged our poetry . . . shall
the names of so many of our colors continue to be derived from those
of obscure foreign localities, as Naples yellow, Prussian blue, raw
Sienna . . . I do not see why, since America and her autumn woods have
been discovered, our leaves should not compete with the precious
stones in giving names to colors. (Thoreau 395)

At UMass, I was assigned to live in a dorm named after the author
Thoreau. One evening, I read the one of the writer’s essays, “Autumnal
Tints.” The free-spirited richness of his writing, inspired by the woods of
Walden, where the author built a shack and lived for two years, writing his masterpiece—based on his observations of the changing colors of the seasons, the scents of the trees, and the flavors of the leaves with which he made his herbal tea—resonated deeply with my own experiences at The Spot.

I called both Brian and Andrew to reminisce over, our trips to the place. We had driven over to The Spot many times, but for the first time we spoke about our visits. We realized how it held different meanings for each of us. For one of them, it was a way to escape from a troubled home life. For the other, it was a place to listen to music and to be heard. My relationship with The Spot was a process of self-discovery. It was a lesson on how landscape has the ability to heal and refresh our minds by teaching us how to be present—a subject Thoreau subtly touches on in both “Autumnal Tints” and *Walden*.

I carry a memory of The Spot inside me now. Every time I feel tired, or find myself fretting over something that’s over or worrying about an upcoming event, I shut my eyes and imagine being surrounded by the raw beauty of The Spot. At the end of these mind-vacations I return to the fray, fully present, ready to apply myself to the task at hand with renewed vigor. Hindsight and foresight are important tools to mine lessons from the past and to build the future, and yet, as I discovered during my trips to The Spot, being present is the best way to clear away the clouds of worry and make use of these learning devices.

I have learned as well to keep my eyes open and not ignore something just because it’s “back there;” who knows what other Spots and Waldens are waiting to be discovered in an abyss, to be reinvented under a pen or a brush.

**Work Cited**

A KEY WITH NO DOOR

Christina Frietas

Light glistens against the powdered snow piled haphazardly along the sidewalks, muddying where cars have piddled slush along the road. As I step out of my dad’s car, a breeze ruffles through my hair, blowing a few dark, unruly strands across my face. Scowling, I brush them back into a chaotic sort of order as winter blankets me in the scent of pine needles, fresh snow, and the exhaust fumes of Christmas shoppers. I hurry up to keep with Dad. A purple awning decorated with swirling golden letters and arcs appears before us, and as we enter the Hallmark store, a current of cinnamon and Christmas spirit envelops me. My father, smiling, tells me not to take too long. I always do. Several minutes later, I am standing at the cashier with gifts for my family. The cashier looks down at me, then up at my father, and smiles. “You’re so cute,” she says. Then, to my dad, “She looks just like you.” I share a knowing smile with my dad. Absently, I run a hand through my thick, dark hair and thank her as she bags my items, and my father and I pass through the toasty room into the bitter winter before us. It’s my hair that completes this resemblance I share with my father. It’s his heritage that’s encoded on my face, written in watercolor in my eyes. A key to another culture. Another world. Something that I’ve learned to cherish.

When I was a kid, my hair was notoriously uncooperative, like a little brother who comes running into your room screaming, waving his arms, and, potentially, turning a few toys into projectiles. Elementary school was not much of a problem. Kids jostle and tease at recess, bounce in their seats and flit through the hallways, running when teachers tell them not to, learning ninety percent of the time. Middle school brings the identity crisis. You want to fit in. To be like everybody else. Normal. Any and every difference is scrutinized under a magnifying glass by a gaggle of thirteen-
year-olds playing scientist, determining what's right, what's wrong, and what just doesn't make any sense. There are certain traits that toss you into a particular category, and others that, although relatively unnoticed by your classmates, are acutely highlighted to their bearer. For me, the problem was my hair. Girls with glossy, shimmering locks of pure silk could do anything with theirs. Mine was never like that. Once, I tried to crimp my hair. What I got was a rebellion from every hair follicle, resulting in something puffy and frizzy. Straighteners plowed through the thick hair for a few strands, and then waved a white flag. I was told that I looked exotic by my dance teacher. Immediately, I scrunched up my nose and turned to my mother with a scowl, convinced that the term was a twisted insult, a term for people that didn't look normal. Looking back, it was childish and nonsensical behavior. But when you're a kid, you don't really think. You examine. You take note. You react. To me, it was obvious that my hair was different. It bothered me.

Other girls had silky hair, soft as a puppy's coat. Crisp, straight locks. Curls that bobbed against their shoulders with a ballerina's grace. They fashioned perfectly smooth ponytails worthy of praise, perfect braids that coiled like grape vines in an orchard. Perfect is subjective, but to me, my frustration with my hair overshadowed that. I couldn't see past my agitation, at first, to the connection my hair had blessed me with. My thick, dark brown hair is a trait passed on from my father's side of the family. He grew up on a small island, Santa Maria, of the Azores, a chain of islands neighboring Portugal. His stories about life on the island always enchanted me. Cliffs that dipped into the blue, glittering Atlantic Ocean, orchards of grapes and other fruits, green forests and rural homes, cows dotting the landscape. It was a place where one misdemeanor, even a town away, would reach the ears of a cousin or an aunt and shimmy down the line to your mother, all within the span of a day or two. It is symbolic of a life so little seen in our westernized gaze. Everything there was natural. You grew your own food. Milked your own cows. Yes, even slaughtered your pigs for meat. In westernized America, that lifestyle had all but vanished. But in the Azores, it flourished like a dark rose. My dark hair is dominant among the Portuguese, a symbol of my heritage. You don't think of these things when you're young. You think of making friends and meshing into the crowd,
because someone who stands out is easily and frequently criticized. You try desperately to fit into the puzzle. Jagged edges and all. But you don’t realize that those jagged edges aren’t necessarily meant to fit perfectly with someone else’s puzzle. They’re meant to fit in yours.

But the syndrome of children who want desperately to become part of the mold isn’t one lost on adolescence or adulthood. No. Society presses you from all sides into a broom closet with a small television and entreats you to listen. They show you what the movie stars look like. The models. The latest trends. They give you a spoon brimming with what society will find the most appealing, and you swallow it, bitter pill or melting chocolate. In our fast-paced world, society likes to define what is acceptable. Society tells you that your nose is too big, too small, too crooked, so get a nose job. Society tells you that you’re lacking. Fix it. Here. Look at this ad. I know you’re interested. I can see the gleam in your eye. I can see those gears turning. Let me compliment your smarts. And while I’m at it, buy this product, this hair dye, this make up, get this plastic surgery. It’ll make you beautiful. Appealing. Desirable. Smarter. More confident.

Everyone knows that when you know you look good, you feel good. It’s true. You gain an iota of self confidence. Self assurance. And in the process, you lose something. Something that makes you inherently unique is dropped through a storm drain, a penny forgotten the moment it’s lost. But why is that necessary? Why is the natural thrown into the nearest dumpster like rotten leftovers for an alley cat to pick up later? So your hair is a fiery lion that won’t be tamed by any hair spray, hair gel, straightener. It’s not a smooth mold like this actress, that model. I don’t understand why that matters. Your hair is as much a part of you as the shoes you wear, the clothes you buy at the store. Is it really essential that you alter your persona because a few people think it looks best? I sometimes wonder, without society cornering us with sirens and subtle duress, whether we would consider surrendering that piece of ourselves at all.

Maybe it’s a ridiculous question. Maybe not.

I know that I bought into some of the hair alterations in middle school. Kids teased me about my bangs and told me that they were old fashioned. So I opted for the side ones instead, desperate to fit in. Highlighted my hair in a dark auburn shade, the color of autumn leaves. Layered my hair to
bring in a bounce, a curl, something fashionable. None of the alterations were major, because a small part of me was afraid to alter my appearance too much. But it felt like being trapped in a crowded room on summer’s warmest day. It felt wrong. I was waiting for the commercially prophesied confidence boost, the rocket launch to self-assurance, but they never came. When my mom brought up that I had my father’s hair, I think that a switch was flipped. I looked around at my Portuguese relatives and I saw dark, rich brown locks in all of my aunts, my cousins, my uncles. I latched onto my father’s stories of adolescence as a life raft in troubled waters, saw pictures of Santa Maria and my father’s white, red roofed home. It was gorgeous. I didn’t care that it wasn’t a mansion, grandiose and dominating the landscape. There was nothing particularly special that would have illuminated its enormity in another person’s eyes. But its natural beauty grappled with a small part of me that was dying to draw close to the flame of my heritage. It sucked me in. And I realized that these visual clues hinting at my heritage weren’t something to be embarrassed about. They bridged an important link to my ancestry.

Now I walk into the hairdresser’s, the smell of hair spray and blow dryers cascading over me, and as I take a seat in the red swiveling chairs, I feel a tinge of guilt. Not for the state of my hair, but the effort it takes to tame those strands. My hairdresser starts cutting and shakes her head. “God, you have so much hair,” she’ll say. “I wish I had just some of that hair.” I smile, thinking that when I was as awkward as everyone else, I balked about a trait that had been scratching its way out for years. An irreplaceable foundation of my essence. Why should I follow up on society’s “improvements” with such a large portion of my history at stake? No, I would not be a different person, internally, if I dyed my hair. But what would people see on the outside? Would they see my father’s heritage reflected in me if I chose a lighter shade?

Probably not.

But in a society where the “natural” is losing ground fast, I wonder how the foot race will end. I wonder if my thinking is a remnant of ages past, if it’s been trampled under society’s rapid progress. I know some people don’t mind. They think that nothing can change who they are, not a little color, not a quick fix, which is true to an extent. But when people tell me how

I’m worried that someday, people won’t care enough about these visible traits to maintain them at all. I’m worried that the idea of natural, unique, will recede into the tidal waters of a backwards society, succumbing to the power of our digitalized, light-speed age. We are already standing in the midst of a vast river, dipping our fingers into the cool water around our feet. Ahead lies our modernized world of gray skyscrapers, gray suits, and enormous billboards that scream like a pack of jackals, snaring our attention in their jaws. Behind rests a world where rolling green hills span a self-sufficient, self-assured place, where natural is natural. But our society is obsessed with perfect. Natural has become alien to us. A key with no door.

A shadow blemishing society’s race for perfection, draped in the smog of ages past.
LIFE: ONE CHECK AT A TIME

Sami Merrigan

TO DO:

Clean room
Wash Dishes
Fold Laundry
Bio HW
English Paper . . .

Unmatched socks, unevenly spaced hangers, and clutter are all things that remind me of failure. A loose bag or piece of paper, a crooked picture, or an imperfection in the way some thing is put away, all unacceptable. I struggle every day to keep up with my organization obsession. It isn’t easy to be obsessed; constantly I work towards it, putting in endless effort. My lists help me accomplish everything and keep my head above water.

Dust my Desk (it looked dirty)

In my closet, my hangers, all matching and evenly spaced, display my plethora of color-coded clothing. My shoes are hanging in an organizer. Jeans are stacked neatly in a pile, my shorts next. My clothes folded, all in one place. Boxes all organized by content. Everything is perfectly clear as to what it is, no questions. Walk back into my room and you won’t find clutter (go ahead, open my drawers, look under my bed); nothing is misplaced or strewn about. My drawers are organized in folders and dividers and sections, all making navigating through them a breeze. Under my bed are shelves all organized with homes for everything. The space behind my shelves isn’t visible to anyone, yet the organization bleeds through. Paper is neatly stacked in a pile, and even my extra toiletries are stashed away.

When you look around, there is nothing that doesn’t match, from my sheets to my picture frames. My room contains only the colors black,
white, purple, or green. My desk is neatly on display for anyone who should happen to look into my room and see a little part of me (first impressions, as we are told, are crucially important). The last thing you will notice is my to-do list, the only item askew in my room. My life condensed to a simple list, all printed in perfect penmanship (sloppy handwriting isn’t acceptable).

**Wash Mug (finished my tea)**

Organization isn’t just my obsession but the way I live. It dictates me. It may seem silly, but if everything isn’t perfect, then I feel like I’m not living up to my potential. Cleanliness is my way to feel at peace and calm. Messes make me feel anxious and nervous; I’m not relieved until they are gone. My obsession with organization is not only a conception of who I strive to be, but also how I wish to be perceived (don’t get me wrong; my organization is just as much for me as it is for “show”). I’m always reaching for perfection. I’m terrified that one day I might jump for the bar and fall short, landing in a mess of failure. With this fear of falling into failure, I find myself using my organization and to-do lists as a springboard to insure my success. Without this crutch to lean on, I’m terrified of failing, terrified of not being perfect, of failing. To-do lists haunt me; unchecked boxes loom over my head like black clouds of failure. *Why couldn’t I fit everything in? Am I that unorganized that I couldn’t get it all done?* Every unchecked box warns me of what might come should the black cloud burst and begin to pour. This obsession with my to-do lists and organization, as you can see, comes from my deep routed fear of failing.

**Put away my books**

When I was little, I loved seeing my Grami (she insisted on it being spelled the same way my name is). Whenever I stayed at her house she would make me perfect blueberry crepes in the morning and do my hair, always repeating, “it takes pains to be beautiful” as she brushed it. This statement was never directed to pressure me or to make me feel inferior, but it ingrained in me at a young age that no matter what the toll or pains,
you must always be beautiful. Beauty to me is not just about physical appearances, but your overall person. You must always be kind, pretty, smart, strong, independent—essentially perfect. I always strive to be this beautiful, perfect person, despite any obstacles that may come my way.

My parents never gave me the option to fail, nor do I ever wish they had. Failing is like drugs: you just know not to do them; you just don’t fail. My family assumes that I will get A’s, work out everyday, organize my closet, fold my laundry, brush my hair, and be perfect. These standards stemmed into an obsession, a way of life from which I cannot, and will never, sever myself. Perfection is like an asymptote: easy to define but impossible to reach; knowing this will never stop me from trying. You might think this incredible pressure from my family would be a curse, but I perceive it as a blessing. Success was mandatory, never just an option (excuses were simply laughed at). In my house, we never quit. We always played sports, did community service, got good grades, were organized, were exemplary, were teacher’s pets (because you’ll need recommendations); we were perfect.

When looking into college, I was told about pie charts, and how they wanted someone who was well rounded. I was expected to be that pie chart, with the perfect combination of athletics, extra-curriculars, grades, and teacher recommendations. Outside the pie chart, I was expected to be healthy (never overweight) and organized (never messy). My parents probably never realized how much pressure they placed on me, but I wouldn’t change it for the world. Some crack under pressure, but I thrive. Their rigorous demands made me who I am today; they have helped me never to accept failure as an option.

English Paper . . .

I say this not to make you pity me, but to help you understand why. The one unchecked box on my to-do list means failure, something that I can’t have in my life. To many, a piece of paper on the floor is something that can be overlooked, but it mocks me. The paper is a symbol of failure, failure to stay clean; it screams at me so loud in my head that I can’t do anything until I pick it up. If I begin to let one thing go, what could happen next? Could I fail at something that actually counts? If I begin to fail at
something so trivial, it only says that I'm capable of failure. I can't have that; I can't slip below the bar my parents set so high for me.

Before I sat down to write this paper, I made sure my closet was spotless and my bed was made. The only things on my desk are my tea, the instructions for this assignment, and my to-do lists. I am incapable of just sitting down and writing this paper. Throughout writing this, if I saw dust, I had to clean it. When I finished my tea, I had to wash the mug. I saw my backpack, then I had to put away my books. I remembered to post on Moodle; it couldn't wait; it had to be done right away. As the boxes accumulate on my list, I have to check them off. And the unchecked English paper box is yet another black cloud hanging over my head.

**Post to Moodle ☑**

In some ways I would definitely say that my obsession with organization and to-do lists helps me conquer my fear. Day by day. List by list. When I feel like I'm slipping down the path of failure, I write a list, then a new one, then another and another. In my closet at home, amongst the organization, there are books and books of lists, all perfectly checked off. And the mere reason for writing this English paper is simply to put a check on my list so I feel accomplished, like what I am doing means something. Once more I've proved to myself that I have held up another day without failing. The little check holds the responsibility of my sanity, my obsession, my life.

**English Paper ☑**

Another small battle won in the war against failure; a cloud dismissed. Another sliver of peace created by a single flick of the wrist.
The picks lie in my hand. The guitar is on my lap and the tape recorder is on the desk in front of me. There are five picks that can usually be found in my left-hand pocket: three fingerpicks, a thumbpick, and a flatpick. I’m not quite sure why I always carry them with me, as I don’t always have a guitar handy. Maybe it is because so many people have guitars, and I want to be ready to play at moment’s notice.

Music, to me, is a vehicle to show the world a different side of my personality. As far back as I can remember, I’ve worn the label of “the blind guy.” While those three words don’t particularly conjure up anything special, it is those three words that set me apart from a sighted world that refuses to understand me or accept me as normal. It is the blindness that drives a wedge between me and my peers and my co-workers. People cannot comprehend that I am a normal member of society. That I have adapted myself to fit in their world. When friends first meet me, I can practically taste the tension in the air. Not quite sure what to say, afraid of offending me, they skate around the edges of a conversation, and it takes some people a lot of time to move into the center.

My musical training started early on in life. Born four and a half months premature, I was in and out of hospitals for about a year before I was deemed healthy enough to return home. Doctors felt it would be good for me to hear my parents’ voices, and so mom and dad taped themselves. But when the night-shift nurses came on, my nurse would take out the tapes of my folks’ voices and play Celtic folk music until dawn. Apparently those sounds, soaked through the pillow, have remained embedded in my brain because: I’ve always been attracted to folk music. My tastes are very eclectic, but folk remains at the center of what I listen to.

As is the common belief for most young blind children, it was decided that I would be a prodigy when it came to playing piano and that my life would be geared to the study of this instrument. Given a little keyboard at
age three, started on lessons at four, I plowed on through practicing the piano until around age fifteen. At first I was eager to make music. It did not matter to me that it was other people’s melodies or that there was no emotion behind the playing. It made my grandparent smile and my parents put in so much time driving me to lessons, I felt it was my duty to learn intricate melodies to play after dinner. Practicing wore on me after a while; I began reading poetry instead of practicing my assigned pieces because they were not beautiful to me anymore. So many people wanted me to devote my life to concert piano. But this was not a personal aspiration. I wanted to shape my own path, and often I would sit composing my own melodies instead of practicing my material for the weekly lessons.

I learned early on that people appreciated my music; and while I loved playing for them, I soon realized that I was doing what was expected of me: when blind, play the piano. In high school, my musical tastes shifted to old country music from the 50s, singer-songwriters from the 60s and 70s, and Appalachian folk music. Always an outsider as far as my musical tastes are concerned, I never really caught on to what my friends enjoyed. I wanted to reproduce what I was listening to, but didn’t like how it came out on a piano.

In tenth grade, a Spanish teacher began instructing me in the ukulele. We had traded music in class, and naturally that came around to his offering me ukulele lessons. I had already started writing songs, knew what I wanted them to sound like, and loved the idea of finally having a stringed instrument. I felt that the ukulele would be more versatile, allow me the dexterity and speed that the piano could not offer. In a month, I was teaching myself chords. I was able to play all sorts of songs: ballads and love songs, country songs from Hank Williams, Ray Price, Faron Young and George Jones, and singer-songwriter material from Jim Croce, Blaze Foley, and Townes Van Zandt. Every new artist I discovered presented me with a new way of looking at a song. I gravitate towards folk ballads and honky-tonk music because of the emotion. You can relate to it, whether it be blues or honky-tonk country or sad songs or love ballads, it’s all folk to me, the music of a common people, the ordinary folks. If I could write songs like those that influenced me and brought out emotions in me, if I could make
people feel the way I did or influence emotion in them, allow them to see the world differently, then I would finally be composing the music I wanted to.

By the next spring, I had learned how to play in two different keys and was developing my strumming. I could tell that it was coming along nicely. I devoted hours of practice to the ukulele; it wasn't drudgery as the piano had been, for on ukulele I could play any songs I wanted because pretty much everything I listen to is comprised of three chords. Piano lessons had all but faded at this point. In a way, I perceived my love and constant attention to the ukulele as a way for me to quietly rebel against all those who demanded that I learn piano. It was my way of dispelling the myth that every blind man who sits in front of keys will become the next Ray Charles. There were things I loved, and still love about the piano, but the ukulele was easier: it was portable and light-weight; I carried it everywhere and played it every chance I could.

I slowly built up a catalogue of my own compositions, drawing heavily on everyday life around me and my own experiences. Lost love, trains bearing bodies home to waiting families while a lover waits behind because he is too poor to afford a ticket to his girl's funeral, homeless men in the streets of Boston, the joy of new love, and celebrations of nature are themes that resonate through some of my songs. I use my writing as a vehicle to demonstrate to the world—that looks at me and sees only the blind man—that within me lurks a deep, introspective, and simple guy. I'm giving you that glimpse into my soul. I find that writing lyrics allows me a chance to express emotions I have immense difficulty expressing in everyday conversations. While some songs might on the surface appear to be about entirely different experiences, there are always certain lines that stem from events in my life at the time of composition.

An ex-girlfriend who shared my passion for folk music inspired me to play the guitar. She purchased me my first guitar, a beautiful Gibson, for Christmas a year ago. Within three weeks, I knew my way around the fretboard and was picking out complex Delta and Texas blues chords in the style of Blind Willie McTell and Lightnin' Hopkins. For a while, my ukulele remained my instrument of choice as far as composing went; I'd been playing it longer and felt more comfortable writing on it than a gui-
tar. Since that point I have worked ceaselessly to hone my craft. I’m guilty of a form of people-watching; I sit in the dining commons or lounges or the library, picking up snatches of lines of conversation and writing them down or speaking them into a tape recorder. My music is connected to me in such a personal manner, even if I didn’t write the songs I choose to sing. I always tell people that you can usually judge my mood by the songs I sing. Should I feel blue, then the dark material shines. Should I be joyous, then the hillbilly in me comes out and I sing something with a swinging beat.

I’ve had people tell me to play modern stuff. “Play Lady Gaga!” I’ve had enthusiastic people tell me while I sit on a street corner with my guitar or ukulele in hand, my Fedora placed gingerly between my feet to collect passing change. I smile and shake my head. “I don’t play modern.” “Play some modern country, then.” “I don’t play that stuff. That’s not country to me.” Losing an audience? I don’t think so. They seem to like what I’m doing. Music is my life. It allows me to have a deeper connection with people than I do if I don’t have a guitar, ukulele, or dulcimer in my hand. As for my choice of music, there’s nothing more raw and honest than folk music.

I’m working at self-producing an album. I’m trying to show demos around, hoping to end up on an independent label that would market my music better than I can. I’m fine with the idea of a record contract, with the stipulation that I record my own music and nobody touches it or alters it. It’s the same way with my blindness. I’m fiercely independent, and will never back down and conform to what society expects of a blind man. I won’t play anything but the music that I love. That’s not me, that’s not being true to myself and to what I believe in. So give me a quiet room and lend me your ear, and I’ll sing you my soul and show you who I really am. I hope you like me. I hope you can see the real me, the me behind this mask of blindness.

The guitar is on my lap, the picks on the desk. Around me, in my dorm room, lies evidence of the importance that music plays in my life. The ukulele and dulcimer hang on the wall; a second guitar sits near an amplifier and gigantic tape recorder. Microphones on stands sit in a corner. In the opposite corner are a hand-cranked Victrola and a modern turntable for playing vinyl records. Crates of records and CDs lie underneath the
record players. I pick up the guitar and begin strumming. Anywhere I go a song is in my heart, usually one that fits my mood or describes who I am at that point in my life.

Give me an empty room or a street corner, a small gathering of friends or a music festival. I’ll sing you my life, and if you want to get to know me, just close your eyes and listen.
THE SMALLEST, MOST UNOBTRUSIVE PACKAGE

Jenna Stanwood

The humid summer air hung heavily on my shoulders as I bounced like a toddler next to my father. The sickly yellow lights of the strip mall overhang cast everyone’s faces into jaundice-like shadows.

“You know you’re a nerd when you can honestly say you recognize people in front of you because they wore the same robes to the last premiere,” my dad whispered to me conspiratorially, chuckling lightly. I giggled nervously, lightly scratching the lightning bolt drawn on my forehead in eyeliner. A month after my high school graduation, I stood in line outside of the slightly-worse-for-wear Hoyts Cinema 8. My father and I had been making these midnight excursions to the theater since the November after I turned eight. Once again, we waited in line for our turn to wade through the crowd of other costumed fans and find the best seats possible for the midnight premiere of the latest Harry Potter film.

When I was five, my father brought home a small red and blue book titled Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone. The night before, we had finished JRR Tolkein’s The Return of the King at bedtime, and I was determined to convince my father to begin The Hobbit tonight at bedtime, hoping for another adventure through Middle Earth. Instead, he sat my brother, sister, and me down in the upstairs hallway, all of us freshly bathed and cuddled into soft pyjamas, and began to read to us about a little boy with a lightning scar on his forehead. By the third page, I was hooked.

Since that night, I have grown up with the Harry Potter books and films. I would wait in line for hours at midnight to buy the newest book; I’d buy tickets to movies months in advance, just to be one of the first in the theatre; and when I had no one to talk to at school, Harry was there to keep
me company. Most of my childhood was spent waving sticks around while hoping they would spark or acting out my own Hogwarts adventures with friends.

It was depressingly appropriate that the final installment of the series would be premiering just weeks after I graduated high school and a month before I left for college. All at once, the door to my childhood was slamming shut in my face. When the film drew to a close, my childhood would be over and the rest of my life would be a downhill slide.

As the last scene faded, I wiped furiously at my tears. This was it and there was no going back. My childhood had slipped from my grasp. I compulsively reached down to tug and turn the little star bracelet on my wrist, a habit I had recently formed when anxious or upset. As the lights began to fade on in the theater, I fixed my eyes on the bracelet, hoping to hide my burning tears as I examined the plastic.

There’s a whimsical quality to the bracelet, perhaps because it was made by the small hands of a child or maybe because we all wore one as a child. It’s a small loop, about the size of my wrist, of small plastic beads in the shape of stars. Connected by a light pink cord and slightly faded from repeatedly being stretched around my wrist, the beads are arranged in the colors of the rainbow: first red, then orange, then yellow, then green, then blue. The beads are the type you find in a child’s craft kit, chunky and bright, and the whole creation is rather easy to dismiss as the product of a little girl, stuck inside on a rainy afternoon. The bracelet came to me in the hands of a three year old girl with softly curled brown hair and the kind of half-mischievous, half-playful twinkle in her soft brown eyes that seems to magically appear behind a child’s eyes on their second birthday. The beads had been chosen and strung by her small hands in a bout of innocent generosity so common in small children. I was responsible for Kayla’s life and health for four hours every Tuesday while her mother taught ballet and her father crunched numbers at one of Hartford’s largest financial firms, and I had known her since she was born. It was before one such babysitting session that her small fingers gingerly dropped the plastic creation into my palm. It was the month before my high school graduation, and I was preparing to leave behind the six-thousand person town in Connecticut—a town where I had spent my entire life, where everyone knew my name—
for a twenty-five thousand person university in Massachusetts where I knew no one.

Suddenly, the movie theater seemed uncomfortably small, and for a fleeting moment, I felt almost as if I shouldn’t be wearing the small string of plastic. I would be turning eighteen soon; I was hardly of an age appropriate to be wearing plastic beaded bracelets and running around with lightning bolts drawn on my forehead and a wizard’s wand in my hand. For the first time in a long time, I tugged at the bracelet, beginning to remove it from my wrist.

The bracelet often attracts stranger’s eyes for a fraction of a second while they’re doing the standard eye sweep of judgment as we pass on the street. I’ve learned over the years not to draw attention to myself; growing up in the closet does that to a person. While trying to hide your sexuality from your classmates and your family, you learn to hide yourself as well. I learned that by becoming a chameleon, drawing as little attention to myself as possible, I could avoid the physical and emotional abuse my classmates had hurled at me before I even knew what a lesbian was. By the time I reached high school, it had become second nature: speak only when one of them speaks to you, don’t defend yourself, keep your head down, and don’t tell them anything. The plastic bracelet normally would have been something to be avoided, shunned at all costs for its eye-catching nature. I had become a hollow shell of the nerdy, quirky person I had once been.

However, the moment I put the bracelet on, it became a part of myself, drawing out my personality, reminding me of the person I desperately wanted to be again; I couldn’t make myself take it off. The bracelet had its own magic about it, melting my shell. Most eighteen-year-old college students wouldn’t wear a beaded bracelet made by their three year old neighbor, let alone run around in a Hufflepuff shirt and fake Harry Potter glasses. My true personality was drawn from my inner child, the person I was before any shell existed. I don’t think I would have been able to access this part of myself without the bracelet tied to my wrist.

I couldn’t bring myself to remove the bracelet in the dim light of the theater. I couldn’t turn my back on this desperate, childish need for magic to be real; this carefree ability to believe and just know; this preoccupation with the sweet, delightful, simple things; this innocent ability to just be
myself and let everyone else deal with it. I didn’t care that I was almost an eighteen-year-old college student. I clung to the bracelet, seeing in it the delight and warmth of my childhood. I saw in it the way that Kayla saw the world: everything bright and shiny and new, always something to be learned and explored, generously giving out handmade bracelets, laughing freely and finding magic everywhere. As I pushed myself out of the theater seat, shuffled across the sticky linoleum and out to the car, it was as if my childhood was dangling around my wrist. Though I wasn’t currently living it, it would always be with me, reminding me of the brighter, simpler things in life as I ventured into college and the adult world. The people and places I had known and loved from Canton, CT didn’t have to be left behind and forgotten despite my new address. I never have to truly turn my back on my childhood. I can move on and still keep a piece of it with me that reminds me of the person Kayla taught me to be, and the magic that always had and always will surround me. Suddenly, walking away from the theater wasn’t nearly as hard anymore because with that bracelet around my wrist, I knew I could easily integrate the carefree, magical days of my childhood into the adult that I would become.

I’ve always believed the the smallest, most unobtrusive packages can carry the most magic and meaning in life. When looked at by the right person at the right time, the smallest object can gain the most meaning. These things are easily missed by those who aren’t bothering to look. What appears to be a useless plastic bracelet to most people holds a world of meaning to me. If it weren’t for this small plastic bracelet, I truly wouldn’t be half of the person I am today.
In the first unit, students looked at their own experience and wrote personal essays for personal audiences. As they progressed through the semester, students moved from a more personal audience towards an academic one—and thus began the process of writing for the needs and expectations of more distant audiences—audiences they would not see before them in the form of fellow classmates, family members, or friends. In Unit II, students were asked to integrate their own ideas with the ideas of others by responding to, or “wrestling with,” a complex published text. Key elements of academic contexts such as the use of textual sources and citation formats were introduced in this unit.

The essays in this section of the Student Writing Anthology show students interacting with the work of a published author or scholar, and comfortably speaking with some degree of personal authority. In Unit I, students exhibited authority in writing about their own lives. In Unit II, students used the perspectives they gained from their own lives to write within a larger conversation in which their ideas were still central, but were not the sole focus of their writing. No person can respond to a text without using and incorporating their own unique perspectives and contexts that stem from their own history and experiences. In this second unit, students have gradually moved from a solely personal context to a less familiar one, while still finding authority in their own personal perspectives as well as in the content of the essays to which they have responded.
WHY BOTHER?

Sarah Carragher

At this very moment, hundreds of Americans are camped out by Wall Street. Why? They are fed up. They are protesting the economic oppression of ninety-nine percent of American citizens. The power, they argue, is held by an elite one percent. That power, otherwise known as wealth, keeps the rest of us overworked and underpaid, or unable to find work. It keeps us in our place, wherever that happens to be. To break out of this—to spread that power and wealth to the greater population—is no easy task. So where does that leave us with regard to global issues like climate change? We are stuck in the rat-race that is the other ninety-nine percent. For many of us, finding the time to clean the kitchen floors is a challenge, let alone changing our whole way of life. A revolution is, in my mind, long overdue. The question is: how will it happen?

In his essay “Why Bother,” Michael Pollan introduces a new perspective on why we should go green. He addresses the seriousness of global warming, then goes on to say that it is caused by a crisis of character. According to Pollan, people are waiting for change to be forced upon them by the government, engineers, and producers of our nation: these are the specialists that structure our lives and yet “this same division of labor obscures the lines of connection—and responsibility” (Pollan 213). I will not argue this point, nor hesitate to agree with his suggestion that people make some lifestyle changes. However, Pollan makes some criticisms that are a bit more complex than he addresses in the article. He says, “We prefer to cross our fingers and talk about the promise of ethanol and nuclear power – new liquids and electrons to power the same old cars and houses and lives” (214). He cites Wendell Berry that our culture subscribes to a “cheap energy mind”; we have a habit of waiting on new scientific breakthroughs to enable us to carry on just as we have—rather than making sub-
Substantial lifestyle changes to solve climate change permanently. He makes a valid point in criticizing this way of thinking. Still, the essay puts great weight on individuals taking initiative in changing their own lifestyles, which is where I find fault.

Society has a firmly set structure, and a change in mentality is no small matter. Sure, phrases like “free country” and “free enterprise” make it seem like citizens here have all the freedom in the world. And if you are among the fortunate few, it may be as simple as planting a garden and buying a Prius to make the whole country go “green.” It might be a simple task “for one day a week, [to] abstain completely from economic activity; no shopping, no driving, no electronics” (215). But for most of us that is more than a sacrifice—it is out of the question. A Prius costs upwards of twenty-thousand dollars, which may be why some of us opt for cheaper cars with less fuel-economy. People pollute the roads with their gas-guzzling Ford F150s so they can drive to work and earn the income to refill those cars and pay the bills and put food on the table. And that food might have a big carbon footprint, but it is affordable. And if one has to work forty- to sixty-hour weeks, gardening does not necessarily have a place in one’s life. Ultimately, we have to do more than shift our priorities for this viral social change to take effect: people must join together and demand change. We cannot drastically reduce our carbon footprints without first freeing ourselves from the ownership of big businesses and people in both economic and political power. For example, items are shipped to the United States from China, emitting a good deal of carbon along the way. Consumers here buy these products because they are affordable. These same consumers work nine-to-five jobs for low wages selling these imported goods, and the cycle continues. What I am suggesting is simply to remove the cause before the effect. The firmly set habits of our country (and many others) are the cause of climate change. Tackling global warming should be the step taken after we have dealt with these large-scale socio-economic problems.

Michael Pollan believes a major change in thinking, and in lifestyle, is of utmost importance. I could not agree more. As we drive by a Dunkin’ Donuts on every corner and flip through commercials for fitness equipment, we see things in much the same light. It looks an awful lot like cul-
tural decay. While we agree on the source of the problem, our opinions will vary on how change should play out. In his essay, Pollan envisions “a process of viral social change” (214). That is, if his readers change their lifestyle practices—become self-sufficient and reduce their carbon footprints—this may produce a ripple effect and eventually become the norm. And maybe “new moral imperatives and new taboos will take root in the culture” and “[d]riving an S.U.V. or eating a 24-ounce steak . . . might come to be regarded as outrages to human conscience” (214). Pollan wants to work from the bottom up, creating a “chain reaction” that over time takes society’s habits and views and turns them upside down. Pollan’s idea is inspirational, but given the oppressive structure at hand, it seems less than attainable to me. There are too many factors keeping people in their places. People are busy, tired, and anxious. It is too big a challenge for one person to take on, changing their complete lifestyle and way of thinking. Moreover, most people are not courageous enough to deviate from societal norms. It seems sad and indeed frustrating, but it’s easy to be outcast by a society so set in their ways.

If society as a whole is going to change its path, it’s going to take major social reconstruction. In contrast to Pollan’s idea of a spread of change throughout society, I believe citizens need to unite and demand changes from their leaders—those they have been so politely waiting on to instruct them. Pollan argues, “If you do bother, it will set an example for other people. If enough people bother, each one influencing yet another in a chain reaction of behavioral change, markets for all manner of green products and alternative energies will prosper and expand” (214). I am not suggesting that his idea is impossible, but it is rare that someone diverges from society’s standards and gets enough followers to change the social structure. Pollan admits his idea is a longshot, and I won’t pretend mine is foolproof. But I have often heard that my generation may well need to endure drastic changes in our way of living, and if that’s the case, we will need to work together. If society as a whole can adopt a new mentality, then lifestyle changes will follow. If we are serious about making a large-scale shift, we need to be serious about doing it together.

Just a month ago I had so little faith in my generation that I did not believe they would put forth the effort. However, as the Occupy Wall Street
movement spreads throughout the country and throughout the world, I am beginning to feel more hopeful. Demanding a share of the wealth and power currently held by that privileged one percent is the first step in restructuring our society and life as we now know it. And it is very much necessary. Truthfully, we cannot blame one factor for our crisis of character. It is in ourselves, our communities, the generations before us, the media we are exposed to, and the wealth and power that control us. I am not proposing that social change is a simple task. I do, however, believe that in order to achieve it, we must join together. Pollan makes a respectable point in saying, “Sometimes you have to act as if acting will make a difference, even when you can’t prove that it will” (215). However we choose to initiate change, be it on an individual or a group level, it is important that we do so. It is true we will not know until we bother to try. But if I agree with Pollan on one point, it is that it is worth bothering.

Work Cited
CONSIDERING WHAT WE CHOOSE TO IGNORE

Abagail Gorgone

Is there an aspect of your everyday life that you know is wrong, so you avoid thinking about it? In “Consider the Lobster” by David Foster Wallace, the author explores and reflects on emotions and thoughts that he experienced while attending the fifty-sixth annual Maine Lobster Festival in 2003. While he does not aim to sway the reader, his article poses the question: Do lobsters feel pain? Wallace’s exploration of the possible answers to this question led me to look at ethical issues differently. “Consider the Lobster” sheds light on what humans choose to ignore for their own comfort, and why.

Wallace describes the sights, sounds, and smells of the lobster festival, and my first reaction was that the food included in his description sounded delicious. The speaker describes “lobster rolls, lobster turnovers, lobster sauté, Down East lobster salad, lobster bisque, lobster ravioli, and deep-fried lobster dumplings” (Wallace 301), and my mouth watered. I felt this reaction was worth noting because I had a feeling my thoughts would change by the end of the article. I was right.

While I felt a negative connotation coming on in the near future, for now, the Maine Lobster Festival sounded like a great place to be. My next reaction was familiarity with all that was being described at the Maine Lobster Festival. While my grandfather was a fisherman, I grew up knowing how to properly eat a lobster. It was a part of my mother’s life, ingrained in who she was. Therefore it was a part of my family as well. My father also catches lobsters in his spare time to bring home and boil for dinner, and so the scenes included in the article were not new to me; they were even nostalgic. Wallace’s step-by-step guide to filling up a large kettle with water, letting it boil, adding the lob-
sters, and cooking them until they turn a bold scarlet red was all familiar to me. I pictured countless summers by my pool, letting the live lobsters walk around on the patio before cooking them. I saw memories of my dad, smiling and standing by the huge pot on the grill, as I eagerly asked over and over again if they were done yet.

As I began to remember all the summer cookouts with my family, I came across Wallace’s predictable yet interesting question: “Is it all right to boil a sentient creature alive just for our gustatory pleasure?” (306). And I paused. I asked myself, well, is it? I had never really thought about it. I have said to myself, “Poor little lobster,” as I watched him slide into the pot, but I have never considered if lobsters felt pain. The article explains that some people think they don’t. Although this is comforting, Wallace says this is not true. Lobsters may not have the mental capacity to communicate their fear to us, but they certainly show signs of pain. He poses this example: “a lobster . . . tends to come alarmingly to life when placed in boiling water. If you’re tilting it from a container into the steaming kettle, the lobster will sometimes try to cling to the container’s sides or even hook its claws over the kettle’s rim like a person trying to keep from going over the edge of a roof” (310). This struck a chord in me. I have seen a lobster do this many times, and each time I feel a tiny bit of sympathy, but soon after my thoughts turn to how delicious my dinner will be. Wallace goes on explaining, “And worse is when the lobster’s fully immersed. Even if you cover the kettle and turn away, you can usually hear the cover rattling and clanking as the lobster tries to push it off. Or the creature’s claws scraping the sides of the kettle as it thrashes around” (310). And here is where Wallace truly makes me feel completely guilty, “The lobster, in other words, behaves very much as you or I would behave if we were being plunged into boiling water (with the obvious exception of screaming)” (Wallace 310). This is all very true. I began to wonder about the true scientific answer to the question: Do lobsters feel pain?

“Consider the Lobster” explores the answers. Wallace goes on to explain that ethicists have certain criteria for figuring out if an animal feels pain, and they determine whether we should worry about it. One of these criteria is displaying behavior that we associate with pain. Wallace points out that not viewing struggling, scratching, and lid-clattering as pain-associated behavior would be quite difficult.
I felt a strong reaction to this article because the author made me look at things differently. Wallace compares the killing of lobsters to the killing of cattle. What would people think if there was a “Nebraska Beef Festival” where “live cattle get driven down the ramp and slaughtered right there on the World’s Largest Killing Floor?” (309). (He is referencing the World’s Largest Lobster Cooker at the Maine Lobster Festival.) This horrified me. Why did the slaughter of cattle, though more gory than the killing of lobsters, affect me so much more? Shouldn’t I feel just as sympathetic toward the killing of every animal? And why do I choose to ignore these feelings?

Wallace believes that people simply avoid thinking about the pain animals endure, and I agree. He admits that he likes to eat certain animals and wants to keep eating them. Is this why we ignore the thoughts about others’ suffering? I believe it is. Ignoring these thoughts is “selfishly convenient” (Wallace 314). Wallace does not try to make the reader come to terms with these thoughts; he simply wonders why we often do not.

These questions made me consider what else I selfishly ignore for my own comfort. For example, I know that the Nike factory workers are treated unfairly and work in horrible conditions, yet I own gym sneakers made by Nike. While others suffer extreme consequences to make a small amount of money, I go on wearing these sneakers. With further research, I discovered by reading an article in *Mother Jones* by Keith Hammond that Nike workers in Vietnam in 1997 “were exposed to toxic chemicals,” and “made to work illegal excess overtime” (1). The workers also experienced “poor ventilation, high levels of respiratory illness in areas where toxic chemicals were used, lack of drinking water, poor fire safety, and other hazards” (1). But people, including myself, continued to buy Nike sneakers and products. Why do we avoid thinking about others’ suffering while we remain comfortable?

These unsettling questions claw deeply into one’s conscience. Normally I feel I am a good person: I don’t lie, cheat, or steal. So why am I so surprised at the decisions I make day to day, when pointed out to me in “Consider the Lobster”? The reason is that David Foster Wallace poses many questions to get his reader to consider ethical issues, even those that may seem insignificant, like the simple killing of a helpless lobster.

While Wallace did make me consider ethical issues, not much has changed since my reading his article, and I have pondered and explored the reasons
why. I ask myself: Am I too accustomed to avoiding thoughts of the killing of animals because I’ve ignored them my whole life? This is probably a big contributor. Am I too selfish to become a vegetarian and quit eating animal meat altogether? Well, I don’t believe I’m very selfish in the first place, but maybe I need to take a closer look. I have seen videos of animal slaughter, the horrible conditions they endure, the unjust events they are victims of each day, and I am disgusted. I wonder why we must treat animals so wrongly. And I genuinely care about these topics. Yet my diet has not changed. I am somewhat ashamed to admit these facts because this essay would come predictably and heartwarmingly full circle if it was concluded with my stating, “I am now a vegetarian and will never go back to eating meat.” I could easily please my readers with a sentence like this, but it is not reality.

Throughout my experience reading “Consider the Lobster,” I felt many emotions: sympathy, guilt, and concern. Yet I am living proof of Wallace’s main point: humans are aware but ignore the truth. It’s just too minute to us. I certainly believe there is an aspect of human nature that leads us to conveniently shoo-away facts that shed a negative light on the things we enjoy in our day-to-day lives. Throughout writing my own essay in response to Wallace’s, I have come to terms with the fact that this trait is present in me.

Works Cited
THE UNDENIABLE AND MISUSED POWER OF THE MEDIA

John Kuselias

You find yourself back in your dorm after a long day of classes. The Easy Mac you just took out of the microwave looks so appetizing—it is the first meal you’ve had in hours. Exhausted, you plop down into a cushioned chair and turn the television on. The seven o’clock news has just started. Since you’ve been busy all day, you have no idea what’s been happening in the world. Maybe there are some more developments in the war, or even the national debt, you wonder. The news starts, and the anchor begins talking about the Casey Anthony trial. You sigh in disappointment when you see this, as they’ve been talking about this case for weeks! At least they can’t talk about it for too long, right? Fifteen minutes pass, and they still haven’t changed subjects. Finally, after a commercial break, they will begin talking about the national debt. You want to continue watching for that other news, but the problem is that you are just too busy. You have to study for tests, write papers, and do readings. You turn the television off, and what meaningful information did get out of watching the news today? Nothing.

I’m sure we have all had this experience where we feel that the media has wasted our time. George Saunders critiques the media in his essay, “The Braindead Megaphone.” He blames the media for being full of storytellers rather than newsmakers (243), for putting profit and entertainment over the telling of actual news (245), and not being specific in their explanation of context surrounding specific issues (243). I agree with these claims. The media have an immense power and are able to have a profound impact on society. We rely on them for pertinent information that has a
large effect on our everyday life. Yet many times they just don’t deliver this necessity to us. We, as a society, suffer from a profit-driven media that pursues stories that have little to no impact on a nation that has legitimate problems, yet, when they do cover those specific problems they lack the specificity in their coverage to thoroughly explain the issues to an average viewer.

The media is an industry that wastes its time talking about topics that have little to no consequence in the scope of our nation. Saunders talks about the coverage of unimportant topics in the media by mentioning the O.J. Simpson scandal:

Because the premise of the crime’s national importance was obviously false, it had to be bolstered. A new style of presentation had to be invented. To wring thousands of hours of coverage from what could have been summarized in a couple of minutes every few weeks, a new rhetorical strategy was developed . . . (241)

Saunders is talking about what it actually takes for the media to make news out of nothing. The new rhetorical strategy and style of presentation he speaks of is their need to ask mundane and stupid questions concerning the story to make it seem fresh. The most recent instance of an “O.J. Simpson-esque” scenario is the Casey Anthony case. Nonstop information about a case that was relatively stagnant flooded my television on a daily basis. Could this be the final blow against Anthony? Was it really her daughter in the trunk? More from an expert at the top of the hour! It seemed that news stations had nothing better to report so they collectively beat this case to death. So, why did the media spend so much time surrounding this issue? I believe the answer to be a very simple one: money. The media is a business, and the goal of a business is to make money. Saunders makes the point that money is always part of the equation for the media:

In surrendering our mass storytelling function to entities whose first priority is profit, we make a dangerous concession: “Tell us,” we say in effect, “as much truth as you can, while still making money.” This is not the same as asking: “Tell us the truth.” (245)

If there is no money at stake, then there’s no reason for the media to go after a story. It was clear to me as a viewer that coverage of the Casey
Anthony case was driven by a large profit margin. The media was able to extract money from the case by simply keeping people interested in it. Once people were constantly exposed to it, they began to talk about it among themselves. Even I found myself engaged in many conversations concerning this issue. What do you think of the case? I think she's clearly guilty. I mean, all the evidence points towards her guilt! The interest it garnered built to the point that when the verdict was actually reached, the news exploded with stories about her. As I watched, I couldn't tell if I was more upset that she was actually found innocent or if I was more upset that I would be subject to two more weeks of fallout concerning the trial. Yet this bombshell was exactly what the media wanted. It didn't matter to them if she was guilty or not—it's not like the verdict would have affected them one way or the other. What did matter to them is that she made them a lot of money.

The idea that media only cover lucrative stories begs the question: What about the other news stories that we aren't hearing about? My frustration during the Casey Anthony fiasco came from wanting to see issues on the news that actually have an impact on my life. Instead, I found myself watching news on a case that was a soap opera created by the media. Yet what could I do as a viewer? The only option, I'm afraid, was to wait.

Eventually, that other news does come on—but another issue arises. They begin talking in jargon that doesn't mean anything to a normal viewer like me. Saunders talks about the media and how they approach talking about the context of certain issues:

[The media] is a storyteller, but [their] stories are not so good. Or rather, [their] stories are limited. [Their] stories have not had time to gestate—they go out too fast and to too broad an audience. Storytelling is a language-rich enterprise, but [the media] does not have time to generate powerful language. The best stories proceed from a mysterious truth-seeking impulse that narrative has when revised extensively; they are complex and baffling and ambiguous; they tend to make us slower to act, rather than quicker. (243)

I find this “storyteller” aspect of the media is especially true when the news covers stories concerning the national debt. As I watch, the anchors
and experts begin talking about the Sub-Prime Mortgage Crisis. Different words get thrown around that create confusion more than anything. Subprime Mortgage Crisis? What is a Subprime Mortgage? Bubble? What is the bubble and how did it pop? Why did it pop? When I watch the news I want to be educated about these issues. I want to be able to have an effective conversation with someone who’s equally as concerned about the national debt as I am. Yet I find that I don’t even understand the issue in the least—even after watching hours of coverage. I shouldn’t need a Master’s degree in economics to understand the seven o’clock news. I want to be able to fix this problem that is ailing our country, and there’s no way I can do that unless I find out this information on my own.

Thankfully, there are alternatives to television media; the most prominent for me is the Internet. On the Internet I can do the research necessary to understand the issues that television fails to teach me. There are countless sources at my disposal (hundreds—maybe thousands) as opposed to the three or four big news stations on television (Fox News, CNN, NBC, etc.). Unfortunately, the Internet has its flaws. There are so many unreliable sources that it becomes difficult to sort the true from the false. Problems like this are not as much of an issue on television, as you know you’ll be seeing experts and government officials talking about the issues. The other problem with the Internet is that it is just not as convenient as television. It is so easy to multitask or even just relax during TV broadcasts—whereas researching, finding, and reading about issues on the Internet is too much of a hassle for me—and I just don’t have time to go through this process on a regular basis.

Even if the television media continues to follow meaningless, profitable stories, I find relief in the idea that there are alternatives, such as the Internet, to fall back on. Yet I don’t want to be reliant on an alternative. I want to be able to go back to my dorm and watch a dependable, efficient, and informational news broadcast after a long day of classes. I would be satisfied if the media could just cover the important issues in a way that the general public could understand. But as long as the media is driven by profit, it is hard to say if such a day could ever come.

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STOLEN HOMELAND

Ariel Toledo

Antes de la peluca y la casaca
fueron los ríos, ríos arteriales,
fueron las cordilleras, en cuya onda raida
el cóndor o la nieve parecían inmóviles:
fue la humedad y la espesura, el trueno
sin nombre todavía, las pampas planetarias. (Neruda 1-6)

What is a border? The twisting lines arbitrarily placed on a geographical map of the planet? Gloria Anzaldúa’s “The Homeland, Aztlán/El Otro México” centers on the Mexican border and her feelings for the people crossing it every day. Neruda’s poem talks about how America was before the Spanish took it over. It is similar to the poems Anzaldúa inserts into her essay. Both Neruda and Anzaldúa write about Mexico’s land. Anzaldúa focuses her story specifically on the movement from South to North. Also, instead of “telling” the story, she demonstrates the traumatic journeys of poor men and women crossing the border. She establishes her authority by including pieces of poetry and sentences in Spanish. Her emotions and stories are more believable because the audience knows that some stories come from personal experience and from a place she knows well. Anzaldúa effectively reaches out to the common citizen from America with the intention of depicting foreign scenery, where the reader becomes immersed in the stories of men and women from another country, their culture, and even their own Spanish language.

El hombre tierra fue, vasija, párpado
del barro trémulo, forma de la arcilla,
fue cantaro caribe, piedra chibcha,
copa imperial o silice araucana.
Tierno y sangriento fue, pero en la empunadura
de su arma de cristal humedecido,
las iniciales de la tierra estaban escritas. (Neruda 7-13)
Anzaldúa can write ten pages of only imagery so readers can use their senses to understand her points. By her descriptions of a fence, we can feel her emotions towards the structure and being constrained on the other side of it. Anzaldúa writes, “1,950 mile-long open wound dividing a pueblo, a culture, running down the length of my body, staking fence rods in my flesh, splits me splits me . . . This is my home this thin edge of barb-wire” (40). By saying the fence divides her body she is connecting her Mexican past with her American one. She feels she is both, and does not feel it is right to have to pick one over the other. Why should there be a border when she is part of both cultures? A border denotes the current political ownership of countries; they do not take into account the ownership of previous landowners. The fence is then a symbol for both a mental barrier and physical barrier; each side is divided by both her American and Mexican heritages. The mental side involves feeling wounded by a theoretical fence; she cannot pick between the two cultures and would rather be able to live with both, but the fence keeps these them separated. The physical aspect divides her American and Mexican self with a tangible fence.

Nadie pudo
recordarlas después: el viento
las olvidó, el idioma del agua
fue enterrado, las claves se perdieron
o se inundaron de silencio o sangre. (Neruda 15-19)

The words she uses are powerful and forward her thought on what she believes is wrong. Another example of her imagery is “the Gringo, locked into the fiction of white superiority, seized complete political power, stripping Indians and Mexicans of their land while their feet were still rooted in it . . . we were jerked out by the roots, truncated, disemboweled, disposed, and separated from our identity and our history” (45). She is talking about the United States taking the land the Mexicans lived in. Anzaldúa not only speaks for herself, but also relates to everyone from Mexico by using the word “we.” Anzaldúa does not think it was fair that her people’s lands were taken from them, while entire families lived on them.
No se perdió la vida, hermanos pastorales.
Pero como una rosa salvaje
cayo una gota roja en la espesura
y se apagó una lámpara de tierra. (Neruda 20-23)

During many instances in the essay, Anzaldúa incorporates Spanish poems, words, and phrases. This shows us that she is strongly attached to her country and its problems, and helps readers connect with her story. She can extend her authority over the issues happening to try to communicate them to the rest of the world. The verses she includes allow Anzaldúa to talk about her own family. Right after talking about the impassible fence, she added this passage, “Yo soy un puente tendido del mundo gabacho al del mojado, lo pasado me estira pa’ trás y lo presente pa’ delante, que la Virgen de Guadalupe me cuide ay ay ay, soy mexicana de este lado” (41). In this passage she explains she is like a bridge between the past that holds her back, to pushing her life forward in the present. As a Spanish speaker, I could understand this passage, but if her audience were from America not too many people would be able to understand it. She uses this to her advantage because she makes it seem as if there is another layer of feelings that the reader cannot interpret.

Yo estoy aquí para contar la historia.
Desde la paz del búfalo
hasta las azotadas arenas
de la tierra final, en las espumas
acumuladas de la luz antártica,
y por las madrigueras despenadas
de la sombria paz venezolana,
te busque, padre mío,
joven guerrero de tiniebla y cobre
o tú, planta nupcial, cabellera indomable,
madre caimán, metálica paloma. (Neruda 24-34)

She also can have the same influence on people like me because there were words I could not understand. A bilingual reader should understand
the whole meaning of the essay, but it was challenging for me because of the Spanish dialect that Anzaldúa uses from Mexico. I have been speaking and reading Spanish since I was born. Yet in Spanish there are many ways to say certain words, and unless you are from the region that speaks the word or phrase, you won't understand it. For example, to say “bus” in Spanish is normally *autobús*, but in Puerto Rico it is called *gua-gua*. Although people from other countries can speak Spanish, they might not know this word. She also uses slang sometimes. On page 41 she says, “in the fields, la migra. My aunt saying, ‘*No corran*, don’t run. They’ll think you’re *del otro lao.*’” Anzaldúa tries to say do not run or they will think you from the other side, but the word in Spanish is *lado*; *lao* is not the formal way of saying “side.” An understanding of this problem, peculiar to vernacular languages—common to those who cannot speak Spanish and to those who are not from Mexico—compels us to think deeper about the issues Anzaldúa raises with her persuasive writing.

*Yo, incásico del legamo,*
*toqué la piedra y dije:*
¿Quién me espera? Y aprete la mano
sobre un punado de cristal vacío.
Pero anduve entre flores zapotecas
y dulce era la luz como un venado,
y era la sombra como un párpad verde. (Neruda 35-42)

Pablo Neruda was a very famous left-wing Spanish poet who wrote Spanish poems on many issues. The poem I incorporated in this essay describes the land in Mexico before the Spanish took over the Zapoteca people in Mexico, and Inca in Venezuela. The Spanish conquistadors took their land, gold, and women. Anzaldúa’s poems depict these men and women trying to go back to their lands that America controls now. For some Mexicans, America’s southern border is their greatest problem. Americans complain that illegal aliens are stealing our jobs, but we do not realize that we stole their land first. Nevertheless, everyone has his or her own “borders,” problems, or concerns. In schools, a language barrier keeps a young kid from learning properly. People think the young kid is stupid.
Just like these things are overlooked, Mexico is overlooked. Next time a “border” confronts you, lost territory is overlooked. Next time a “border” confronts you, consider the history behind your problem.

_Tierra mía sin nombre, sin América, estambre equinoccial, lanza de púrpura, tu aroma me trepó por las raíces hasta la copa que bebía, hasta la más delgada palabra aún no nacida de mi boca._ (Neruda 43-47)

**Works Cited**


Diving into an island nation called Antigua, a country you may have no idea about, you will feel like you were just transformed into a very different person. Are you ready to go on an emotional train ride, one on which you are the target of the insulting, scolding, mocking tone of a person whom you’ve never known until this very moment? Welcome to “A Small Place,” welcome to Antigua, welcome to Jamaica Kincaid’s world of anger.

You have no choice but to be a tourist from a very beginning of the essay. You may not even care if the Vere Cornwall Bird International Airport was named after a prime minister of Antigua because it is one of the few nice public places on the island, but Kincaid already makes you “wonder why a Prime Minister would want an airport named after him—why not a school, why not a hospital, why not some great public monument?” (111). You just simply have no choice; you are a tourist and stay with that title until the end of her essay. Kincaid makes you wonder more and more about everything you see or read: “Why, [the cars] look brand-new, but they have an awful sound, like an old car—a very old, dilapidated car” (112). Then, she throws a cold answer in your face: “Well, possibly it’s because they use leaded gasoline” (112). The facts are so obvious that Kincaid makes you feel like you must be stupid for not knowing that—because she characterizes you as a very curious tourist who wants to know everything about the place you visit. Then, she teases you more for your curiosity, your harmless tourist curiosity that she finds annoying.

You are still a passenger on this draining emotional tour of Antigua: being introduced to many new things about the island as you are controlled entirely by Kincaid’s rhetoric; being mocked and scolded every moment you stay in Antigua. You wonder how much Kincaid really knows
about you. What motivates her to write about you? Does she really hate you, or is there an underlying message that she wants to impart to you—the reader, the tourist? Maybe Kincaid knows who you are; she defines “you” as someone who would bring his or her own books for the trip, and one of those books is about economic history (113). The book may tell you about the past, about colonization and slavery in Antigua decades ago. And if you really are a white intellectual American or European, you will feel uneasy because she actually talks to you the whole time; she insults you, laughs at your curiosity, your ignorance, your stupidity.

You may want to find the reason why she singles you out. Why not another person, why not another race, why not another citizen? As a white person in a developing country, Kincaid must have assumed that you somehow relate to the colonizers that once made “Antiguanans suffer the unspeakableness of slavery” (113). Kincaid treats you as if you were the one who exploited Antigua’s soil, oppressed Antigua’s society, and dominated Antigua’s people. She makes you feel unease and discomfort; she specifically points you out in the essay. But if, for example, you are only an Asian college student, like me, then you will feel like Kincaid is not talking directly to you; it seems like you are only someone overhearing the conversation between Kincaid and some other person. You don’t necessarily feel relieved, but at least you know that you’re off the hook. By this time, you can laugh freely when she mocks the wristwatch, saying that “there was nothing noble-minded men could not do when they discovered they could slap time on their wrists just like that” (113); you realize that Kincaid is actually a funny, sarcastic person.

As a tourist, you seek a beautiful sight to look at where you could be “pausing here and there to gaze at this and taste that” (116). You have a chance to see the “rich side,” the better side of Antigua where the Government House and the American Embassy are located. You have an opportunity to look at the enormous mansions nearby. “How gorgeous they are!” you exclaim. Well, would your reaction be different if you knew one of those mansions was owned by a drug smuggler? Would you still admire the aesthetic of the place and ignore the existence of the ugly truth? Just question yourself: How can people live in this place where good citizens who make hard-earned money are poor, and the ones who are “drug smug-
gler[s],” or maybe a “high government official’s girlfriend” (114), are so rich that they can carry around “three hundred and fifty thousand American dollars” (114) in a suitcase? These people do not even work hard to make money. How can you live in a society where a criminal is considered one of the richest men in the country? Antiguans have lived in this poor and harsh life for so long that the brutal facts become ordinary.

Ask yourself: Where is the fairness of this culture? Do Antiguans have the right to be furious? Does Kincaid have the right to be furious? I am sure that you, as a sophisticated tourist, have the answers for these questions. Even though you can’t control your fictional actions in this essay, even though Kincaid is controlling your thoughts and behavior, I am sure that you still have the logical sense to perceive the state of madness in Antigua. Imagine yourself living in a society in which fairness does not seem to exist, where trust in higher authority is diminished. Where would you turn to call out for help? For Antiguans, they have no choice. They are trapped in this country, this hell on Earth, just like Kincaid’s essay traps you in a tourist’s shoes.

Kincaid may hate you because you remind her of the colonizers who were on the island a long time ago; you remind her of how they used to bring unhappiness to the slaves on the island. The British colonizers left Antiguans with nothing upon which to develop. This leaves Antigua with the only choice: using its natural beauty to attract tourists and their money. Kincaid despises you because you leave her no choice but to serve you—the tourist. But on top of that, you bring her more anger by making her feel envious. You have the ability to escape from your life, your “overwhelming and crushing banality and boredom and desperation and depression” (116). Antiguans, as natives, are too poor to escape from their realities. They live an unfair life with poverty surrounding them, with problems popping up in every thought. And tourists find this place, this hell on Earth, this inequality, to be pleasurable, to be fun, to be a sweet escape.

Does Kincaid have the right to be angry at the tourists? At “you”? It depends on you, the reader, to answer that question. Sometimes, Western people take everything for granted, when, in another area of the world, people fight for basic needs every day. I think Kincaid has the right to be angry. I think Kincaid does not intentionally insult anyone. I think she
only wants others’ attention, for people to listen to her, to hear what she’s been through, to understand her. Her way of expressing it may be strange, but it is effective if you, as a reader, read it with your heart, with the willingness to understand and sympathize. If you, as a reader, put aside your self-consciousness for a while, be what Kincaid tells you to be, and look at Antiguans not only as natives but also as people who call out for help and understanding, maybe you could feel what Kincaid felt, and find pleasure for yourself in a very different way.

Works Cited
Part II

Preface
Unit III

In the essays from Unit III, writers have traveled even further “into the world” by interacting with a variety of texts in order to take part in a larger conversation around a specific subject or issue. Students began by focusing on a topic they cared deeply about, and then imagined a potential audience that might need or want to hear more about it. They researched the larger conversation around their topic, and then found a point of entry in which they could contribute meaningfully to this conversation. These Unit III essays are pieces written for a public audience, using research as the primary “authority” for their paper, although personal perspective (in some cases personal experience) are sources of authority as well. Here are essays that move beyond the “academic” world and are meant for an audience interested in knowing more about a specific conversation.

These essays are evidence of how writing serves the community. Larger conversations and contexts are drawn upon as students engage in discussions centered on issues they find important and meaningful. What appeals to each writer, what they find important and meaningful, has so much to do with their own histories and experiences. In the following essays, students found their own contexts in what others have written/stated about an issue and responded to these texts. This writing has brought them into the “world” and has allowed their voices to be heard as new and integral participants in discussions on a wide variety of topics.
WHAT’S BLACK AND WHITE . . . AND NOT READ ALL OVER?

Maddie Grant

My father relishes his Sundays. There are no games to coach, no trains to catch, and no kids to get off to school. He gets up before the rest of us, even before my mother gets her first cup of coffee (which is a feat in itself), and heads outside, starts up the truck, and begins his morning. His first stop is always the dump where he beats the traffic and chaos that the later hours of the day will bring. His second stop is the Village Market, our local grocery store, where he usually grabs a bag of bagels, eggs if we need them, and, if he is feeling spontaneous, a bottle of Hornstra’s chocolate milk. The items on his list are never quite the same, but there is one thing he always brings back: The Boston Sunday Globe. Upon his return he usually makes his prized breakfast sandwiches for all of us. Once we are all fed and happy, he finally sits down, laying out the Globe in front of him while he enjoys his own breakfast. He looks through every single section, flips every single page, and reads a good majority of the articles. My father looks so at peace, so content every time I see him read that paper, like nothing exists but the tiny black text that covers those pages. He has his Sunday morning ritual down to a science, and at the heart of it is that newspaper.

The reason I share that story is because it makes me think a lot about what my life will be like when I am his age. I try to picture myself, like my father, sitting down at the kitchen table on an early Sunday morning and reading The Boston Globe front to back. But every time I try, I am unable to actually envision it. I have grown up in a world where The Boston Sunday Globe is no longer a widely cherished ritual. Instead, I have grown
up in a world where newspapers appear close to extinction, and Twitter feeds are considered reliable news sources. According to The Washington Post, “[a]verage daily circulation of all U.S. newspapers has been in decline since 1987,” and in 2009 US newspaper circulation rates hit their lowest point in seven decades, losing 10.6% of paying readers from April to September (Ahrens). The situation hasn’t improved since then, and journalists all across the nation have been trying to puzzle out what the causes are, and if there is a solution.

One of the most obvious reasons we would think newspapers are becoming more and more obsolete is technology. In the past twenty years, the Internet has altered our society in so many ways. We can do practically anything on the Internet today: we can shop, communicate with friends, read blogs, create blogs, and watch our favorite television shows. Our computers make it easy for us to never move from our desk. The latest headlines are a click away, and we can pick and choose what we want to read. According to an MSNBC article, “Online Newspaper Readership Overtakes Newspapers,” as of January 2011, more people are getting their news on the Web than through newspapers, and 47% of adults get at least some minimal news via a tablet or smartphone (Choney). Clearly, technology has had an impact on how we take in our information today. The Internet is a huge reason we are not picking up the paper anymore, but it is by no means the only reason.

The steady decline of the newspaper is too large an issue for there to be only one culprit. In the book The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper, Charles Madigan writes that the Internet has certainly played a role but adds, “[g]reat newspapers have been disappearing for years” (6). He believes that the larger reason newspapers have been on the decline is because our culture has changed. Madigan writes, “[i]n an America that seems stripped of leisure time, where young women pound their laptops even as they sip their lattes at Starbucks, and where a vast collection of gizmos has evolved to help everyone multi-task, there may be no time left for a quiet hour during the day for reading a very low-tech account of what happened yesterday” (7). In an age of multitasking, newspaper reading is a burden and too time consuming for many. People find their news in other ways. At my house, mornings are chaotic, so my mom tries to catch five minutes of The
Morning Show as she gulps down her first cup of coffee. For others, it is Twitter updates, blogs, and online newspapers that are the source of their daily news. New York Times columnist David Carr expressed his family's daily routines with similar findings in Madigan's book. As he read the newspaper, his family bustled busily around him, getting ready for the day, and he said, “I looked at the four papers on the table and the empty chairs that surrounded them. Before my second cup of coffee, the rest of my household had already started the day in a new way that had nothing to do with the paper artifacts in front of me. Maybe I was the greater fool” (22).

Maybe he is—maybe we will have to change and adapt to a new kind of culture. However, my fear is that if we move away from the print newspaper and rely only on selective article readings, blogs, headlines, and broadcast television, the quality of journalism will decrease, and as a result our society will be hurt as well. In 2005, Harvard held a conference called “50 years in Media: Changes in Journalism,” where famous journalists from the class of 1955 spoke of their experiences and their opinions of journalism in the modern world. Jonathan Randal, former senior correspondent for The Washington Post, gave a speech titled “The Ultimate Public Service.” In his speech, he expressed fear for the fate of democracy: as newspaper readership decreased, newspaper reading “seem[ed] to be receding with an ever accelerating intensity to the detriment to critical evaluation of issues that lie at the heart of democratic debate in policy making.” If we choose to read only what we want to read, we will lose a greater sense of what is happening in our nation. Newspaper articles provide a critical analysis of issues in politics, the economy, and society as a whole. Randal reminds us of how important journalism is to the functioning of our democracy.

In my 11th grade journalism class, one of our first assignments was to memorize the First Amendment, which outlined the freedom of speech and of the press. My journalism teacher believed it was critical for us to understand that the press was an institution that was essential to our democratic nation because it has, since the establishment of our country, acted as a check on the government and an informant to the citizenry. However, what is scary is that future generations may not see the press's importance if newspapers continue to disappear from our doorsteps, and journalism con-
continues to lose its power. In an article titled “Newspapers Face the Final Edition,” Patrick Tucker provides statistics that show few people between the ages 12 and 25 ever read a newspaper and adds, “[y]oung people aren’t likely to discover the joy of ink-stained fingers anytime soon” (8).

A disconcerting question is, if we aren’t reading newspapers, how are we getting our information? It seems like now we’re not only discarding newspapers but showing disinterest in the news. In a study, “Investigating the News Seeking Behavior of Young Adults,” conducted at Charles Stuart University, researchers found that students had “a lack of interest in government/politics or social issues apart from environment/climate change” (Qayyum 183). If this overall lack of interest in the news, politics, government, etc. seeps into younger generations, it is scary to imagine what the future of our nation will look like. Our democracy has always been run through the people’s passion and interest in government, politics, and social issues. That passion has been at the core of some of the most significant events in our history. It has driven us to fight in wars, spurred social revolutions, and has led us to elect some of the finest leaders this world has ever seen.

In his concluding lines of *The Collapse of the Great American Newspaper*, Madigan writes, “[g]overnment supported by an uninformed citizenry is not a democracy; it is a sham” (232). So, it’s clear that something has got to give. Journalism is far too important to the functioning of our democracy. There is no single, all-encompassing solution that will solve this crisis in journalism, but there are things that can be done to spur interest and motivate younger generations to read the news. Maybe there should be a national requirement for high schools to teach current events, or perhaps college admissions should place emphasis on a student’s knowledge of the news today. Regardless, we as a generation have to acknowledge that journalism is a vital institution in our country. We must learn to adapt to social and technological changes without allowing it to alter our curiosity and intelligence of the world around us. Not too far from now we will be considered the adults, the educators, and the leaders of this country.
WHAT’S BLACK AND WHITE... 
AND NOT READ ALL OVER?

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Something has been stirring in the United States’ major cities over the last few months. At first it was small, but now it is spreading across the nation at a furious pace, and is even gaining international popularity. I am sure that you have heard about what I am referring to: the Occupy Wall Street movement. It seems that you cannot turn on the news or read Internet headlines without seeing something about this massive organization of disgruntled Americans. However, since starting college I have spent little time watching television, so for me this movement materialized out of nowhere, and I had one huge question: What exactly do these people want? The question is simple enough, but the answer, as I have seen, is complicated. Why can I not find one concrete answer? Well, the answer to that question lies in the media, but there are vastly differing explanations of what the protest stands for coming out of different media outlets, mainly the news media and online social media. In order to answer my questions, I wanted to investigate what these different sources were saying about the movement and see how each portrayal is affecting the public’s perception.

The place that I began to look for information about the Occupy Wall Street movement was the Internet. With all that is unclear about the protesters, there is one thing that is common knowledge about them: they are angry about the success of the large banks that started the current economic recession, while the vast masses of Americans are struggling to make ends meet. Their actual goals are a little bit more difficult to nail down, and depending on where you find your information, you are likely to find different answers. Television news has given attention to the movement, but if you rely on this as your only source, you may see a recurring theme in the way that it portrays the movement’s goals. On a Fox News Channel segment, legal analyst Peter Johnson Jr. describes the protesters as “[a]narchists,
socialists, and the most extreme part of American and world labor” (“Occupy Wall Street Hurting Small Businesses?”). This description is full of loaded words like “anarchists,” “socialists,” and “extreme,” all with negative political connotations that depict the protesters as extremists (based on political norms). In watching this news segment, one is led to believe that the Occupy Wall Street protesters are unreasonable in their goals, which are implied to be the creation of a lawless, socialist state. Nothing good comes out of anarchy, so this makes the movement appear to be ill-conceived. The host of the show brings up a graphic that shows the amount of money being used on the protests, and he indicates that the movement has hurt small businesses by blocking access to local shops (“Occupy Wall Street Hurting Small Businesses?”). Again, the movement is made to look evil, as it is wasting money and resources and forcing small businesses (vital to the American economy) to close their doors. Fox News gives a widely negative portrayal of the movement, and if someone with very little knowledge of the situation were to watch this segment, he or she could be persuaded into thinking that the movement is nonsense because it wastes time and money.

I assumed this program was an isolated case, given that Fox News has a reputation for skewing the truth, but as I observed more news stations I began to realize that this was not the case. One such segment that I saw was a CBS Early Show interview with actor and economist, Ben Stein. Stein apparently has devoted much of his life to trying to tame the money politics of Wall Street, but this does not make him sympathetic towards the movement, as he calls the protesters “a bunch of bums” who “light up doobies” (“Ben Stein: What Would He Do?”). In watching this, a viewer is influenced to believe that the protesters are a group of losers and stoners who have no cause for which to fight. Since Stein is essentially an expert on the alleged goal of the Occupy Wall Street movement, his dismissal of it has a pretty profound significance. If he is someone who has fought for the same thing as the movement is fighting for, and he does not give it the slightest bit of support, it makes the movement seem useless and illegitimate. These examples seem to suggest that news media has come to a conclusion on Occupy Wall Street, and news programs appear to be trying to persuade viewers that it is not a worthwhile movement.

I was a little confused as to why the American news media would be so unforgiving to a peaceful group of protesters since it seems to be the kind
of story the media loves. Last winter and spring, the news was deluged by the peaceful protests in Middle Eastern countries such as Egypt and Libya, giving sympathetic portrayals of the protesters who were standing up for their own rights. These protesters were mostly young people who were fed up with the corruption of their political leaders and who conducted non-violent rallies. The media embraced these uprisings because they represented the American values of freedom and people fighting for their rights. Is Occupy Wall Street not a peaceful protest like in the Middle East, and does it not exemplify these same American values? I believe it fits both those characteristics, so there must be something else at play here in the overwhelmingly negative portrayal of Occupy Wall Street on the news.

Maybe it is easier to support an uprising when the unrest does not exist on your home front. A journalist for Thailand’s newspaper The Nation believes that the source of this portrayal is that “[t]he media are part of the establishment, or the elite, which Occupy Wall Street is going after” (Kanthong). This is an interesting point because news networks make a lot of money, much like the Wall Street bankers who are the target of the protesters’ anger. It makes sense that news stations would not attack the rich since this would be like going against their own kind, and thus the protesters become the natural enemy.

Apparently, it has been the trend for the news media to ignore social uprisings, as W. Lance Bennett writes in his books that the political nature of the news greatly influences what is actually portrayed to the public (Bennett 144). Due to the power of politics, Bennett writes, “[i]t is hard for unofficial actors to amass the credibility, resources, and information control necessary to dominate the news long enough to affect the outcome of issues” (144). Judging by the unfavorable coverage of the protests on the news, it seems like a reasonable assumption that money and politics drive what information news outlets give out on their programs. It would also explain why the Middle Eastern protests received more support—rich citizens of the United States were not the enemy in those cases. So, if the media is siding with their rich supporters and financiers, then it raises the question of if what they are portraying as the truth is actually reliable, and whether or not anyone is actually depicting any positive aspects of Occupy Wall Street.

The answer to the latter question is yes, and the outlets that have defended the movement are mostly social media. We live in the age of
Facebook and Twitter, social networks that can connect people from all over the world in seconds. These outlets have definitely been crucial to the protesters, as they have served as the method of organization of the movement (Goodale). Journalist Gloria Goodale believes that social media has formed a “living and evolving database of raw information about the protest movement, its supporters, and its possible goals.” Unlike on news channels, Occupy Wall Street appears to have found its home on the Internet, where it can express its goals and appeal to other people with similar beliefs in hopes of convincing them to come out and join the protest. For example, one of the many Facebook pages associated with the Occupy movement lists the “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,” which partially reads, “[w]e come to you at a time when corporations, which place profit over people, self-interest over justice, and oppression over equality, run our governments; we have peaceably assembled here, as is our right, to let these facts be known” (“Occupy Wall St.”). These are the actual beliefs of Occupy Wall Street that were written at the beginning of the protests. They explain why the protesters are angry, what they want to change, and the manner in which they plan to achieve such changes (a peaceful protest). This page was the first source that I found explicitly to list any kind of written demands and beliefs of the movement. If a curious person were to read this page, he or she would have an understanding of what the protesters hope to accomplish, something that has been left out or subtly brushed off by news channels. The reader would see these people as advocates, which differs from their general depiction as troublemakers by news media.

The Declaration also states that the protesters wish to “Create a process to address the problems we face, and generate solutions accessible to everyone” (“Occupy Wall St.”). In this statement, the protesters express themselves as activists, hoping to solve the problems faced by Americans so that “everyone” benefits. This seems to contrast with the evil, money–wasting, business–killing, anarchists that Fox News portrayed, and instead shows these people as having a cause that they feel strongly about. Through their written manifesto, the protesters do not appear to have no cause (as Ben Stein implied on national news). Social media seem to have given more effort than the news media in depicting the intentions of Occupy Wall Street.
Although social media has been more accepting of the Occupy movement than the news, not everything that is posted there is beneficial to the movement. Most Internet blogs are public, and anyone with Internet access can create an account and post their own words on these sites. Because of this, Gloria Goodale believes that social networks are “helping outsiders who are trying to track the leaderless movement’s next move.” Just as anyone can post on a blog, anyone can read a blog, so those that oppose Occupy Wall Street can see what is being written by people who claim to be protesters and use their words against the movement. These posts can feed the news media, who can then broadcast the views of the most radical people who may misrepresent the original goals of Occupy Wall Street. In her article, Goodale quotes Jonathan Askin, a Brooklyn Law School professor, who states that the difficulty of social media lies “in filtering, curating, dissecting, and synthesizing meaningful media content form the endless flood of isolated data” (qtd. in Goodale). Essentially, there are so many outlets on the Internet that deal with Occupy Wall Street that the public is left to decipher what information should be believed and what should be dismissed. Goodale raises an important point in her article, which is that although social media may give more attention to the actual protester, not everything that is written on the Internet can be accepted as the true beliefs of the movement since it is open for really anyone to comment. However, I find the Facebook page that I viewed to be a reliable source because there was nothing blatantly biased about it, and it showed an actual document that the movement published. This may not be true for all pages, so if you decide to go to Facebook and other social networks to learn about the movement, I suggest that you carefully examine these pages; the bloggers may not be as closely affiliated with the movement as you may think and what is written may not be entirely true.

With two polarizing depictions of this growing movement, it is difficult to decide which one is correct. I am sure there are some truths and some misleading information coming from both camps, but in my more informed opinion, the bias of news media at the expense of the protesters makes it a poor source for someone that is trying to learn about Occupy Wall Street. As I discovered in my research earlier, news networks are big corporations, exactly what the protesters despise, and therefore they are
naturally inclined to defend their own policies rather than side with people that believe the opposite. Since the news media seem to have a stake in the failure of the Occupy protests, they will leave out positive attributes of the movement which potentially misleads the public. Since Facebook and other social media are created by people within the movement, they may be a better source for finding out the true goals and motivations of the movement and may allow people in support of the protest to be heard, unlike news programs. They key thing that I hope you keep in mind when learning about Occupy Wall Street, or other social movements, is to question what you hear and read. Look into things on your own, rather than blindly believing everything that is broadcast via various media.

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Life on the farm is not the life for everyone. A person can learn to appreciate it over time, but it takes a certain breed to choose a twelve-hour day, seven days a week, over what has come to be known as the normal nine to five. One would assume it takes a certain type of person, but Ladd Haystead says, "[i]t would be hard to find an American vocation so variegated, so diversified, so much in competition with itself, with so many different needs and wants, many of which, if granted, would affect other farmers more adversely than they would customers" (1). To look at the development of agriculture on a whole would be a disservice to the hundreds of people who call farming their profession. My father, grandfather, great-grandfather, and great-great-grandfather have all made a living for themselves milking cows. By looking at the industrialization of the dairy industry, I will give context to the growing concern about America’s food industry. Recalls, pollution, and rising oil prices have started forcing consumers to look more closely at the foods they eat. These problems have brought about a long since forgotten way of eating. Once again people are starting to seek out locally grown foods. In so doing, a whole new breed of both farmers and customers are making their way to the table.

My complete maternal lineage has been supported by dairy-based agriculture. In 1896, George Wright, my great-great-grandfather received the grant for our farm in North Smithfield, RI. The farm was small and consisted of a herd of cows that produced enough milk for George to deliver to town residents via his milk truck. For the most part cows were pastured when they could be and then fed grain and hay for supplement. During this time, milk routes were standard practice for small dairy farms and just
about the only way someone in a small community could get fresh milk (Mendelson 30). This business suited both my great-great and great-grandmother and grandfather's lifestyles. When the Great Depression was in full swing, my great grandparents were hardly affected because their “cash income was low, [and] self-sufficiency high” (Haystead 6). When one lives in a community where all the basic needs are derived from within, little can disrupt that balance.

Dairy farms first started being industrialized in the 1930s, when the pasteurization of all dairy products became mandatory in the United States (“Early Developments”). Before that time people were able to own enough cows to produce what they needed for themselves and then sell or trade their excess with neighbors who may have had fresh bread or eggs. Pasteurization requires a fair amount of machinery in order to heat and kill harmful bacteria. Many farms weren’t producing enough milk to make the purchase of equipment worthwhile. Farms that couldn’t pay the overhead were pushed out (Haystead 10). When these farms closed, families packed up and headed to the nearest mill town to find work, which destroyed whole interdependent networks. This wasn’t just a loss of community, but a loss of culture. Americans were being driven off their farms, and all the government did was congratulate the ones that got bigger and picked up the slack (Berry 34).

While others were losing their farms, my grandfather was slowly gaining ownership of my family’s. With this new adoption of ownership came many changes. Right around this time, the Haseotes family was starting a farm of their own in a neighboring town. Their milk production grew swiftly, and in 1955 the first Cumberland Farms milk store opened in Bellingham, MA. This type of store was “the first of its kind to the region, [and] it revolutionized how New England got its milk” (Fadilah). Not long after, these stores slowly started popping up all over the Northeast (Fadilah). My grandfather would head out each morning with a full milk truck only to find customers with plastic jugs from Cumberland Farms. Yes, the very same Cumberland Farms that now sells gas and Twinkies was my grandfather’s milk competitor. To top it off, our milk was delivered on credit that would get squared up at the end of each month, but because Cumberland Farms was cheaper, people stopped paying. My grandfather
decided that if people were willing to drive to Cumberland Farms to buy their milk, then they could drive to our farm to pick it up as well.

Cumberland Farms was able to produce their milk more cheaply because they had expanded tremendously. On Cumberland Farms’ website they show a timeline starting with “nothing but a cow and a dream” (Fadilah). The timeline continues to then say they grew to a point whey they were producing “over a thousand quarts of fresh milk per day” (Fadilah). From then on they say no more about the growth of the actual farm because their actual farm wasn’t growing to fulfill the needs of all the new milk stores they were opening. They were growing by buying and trucking milk from small farms in the area to their pasteurizing facility (Mendelson 46). Today almost every farm sells its milk wholesale. It is then trucked to a processing plant, pasteurized, homogenized, bottled, labeled under one name like Garelick or Hood, packed into a refrigerated truck, and moved again to a grocery store. In one way Cumberland Farms gave small farms a second chance; in another way they were laying the foundation for the industrialization of the milk industry.

Starting with my grandfather’s generation, it became more and more difficult to hold on to the farm. Farms were starting to change from small and biologically diverse to large single crop producers. The idea of growing vast amounts of a single crop descended from industry (Berry 21). Henry Ford took the automobile and the assembly line and turned America into a nation that drove cars. Everything from T-shirts to airplanes could be produced in mass quantities through specialization. Prior to industrialization, manufacturing was, for the most part, done entirely by one person. It has been proven that when given the opportunity to create the entirety of an item, its quality is better than if production is split up into ten steps and completed by different people (Berry 12). The problem with the old method is it takes more time to create fewer products that are then of higher value. Today, hardly anything is created from scratch. Thread is made in one factory, cloth in another, buttons and zippers in yet another, and then everything is bought and shipped to a fourth where it’s assembled. This process has made items cheap, but also has taken away trade skills. Few know how to make an entire shirt, never mind explore space or deal with climate change. We depend on specialists to tell us how and why to do
things and in doing so have lost faith in our own knowledge and abilities. With this mentality, people often assume that a specialist can solve every looming problem, which Wendell Berry describes as “the disease of the modern character” (19).

Specialization on farms is no different. Agribusinessmen have taken farming and turned it into something that goes beyond soil, water, and sunlight. The industrial revolution brought about a paradigm shift. Labor-intensive jobs were being taken over by machines, which led people to believe these jobs were less important. Heavy machinery and pesticides were both developed to allow higher yields with lower costs on farms. In Wendell Berry’s book, *The Unsettling of America*, he goes so far as to say, “We have made it our overriding ambition to escape work, and as a consequence have debased work until it is only fit to escape from” (12). Farming went from being a profession, well respected by communities for producing the fruits of life, to something that required too much work for too small of a paycheck. Communities used to depend on their farmers, and communication with them was regular. In the dairy industry this meant seeing the milkman every morning as he dropped off milk. When these routes gave way and milk started being sold in stores, this communication diminished. Farmers were no longer neighbors or friends, but manufacturers. This has allowed farming to become specialized and customers to place their full trust in the hundreds of products that line supermarket shelves.

During the transition from milk route to farm stand, my grandparents were faced with many challenges. Most customers weren’t willing to make the drive to the farm for a single gallon of milk. Instead of calling it quits and selling the pasteurizing equipment, my family thought outside the bottle. The thick layer of cream that was traditionally left in the milk was starting to be looked down upon because of its high fat levels (Pollan 45). Non-fat, 1%, and 2% milk have all had some of this cream skimmed off. My grandmother started using the cream for pies and other dessert pastries. Customers quickly used the excuse of needing milk to drive down and get a snack. The farm turned more into a business, but this is what it took to continue producing milk and satisfying our customers. Under the care of my parents’ generation, the bakery has continued to grow. Today, it not only supplements income, but also pays all the farm’s bills. I haven’t grown
up like a typical farm kid, milking cows and helping with a garden to minimize food costs. I've been able to go to the supermarket and indulge in whatever it was I wanted for dinner each night. I used to think nothing of these habits until I started learning about the devastating effects this careless attitude is having on our planet.

For so many years industrialized farming was able to keep the wool pulled over consumers’ eyes. Margarine that was pumped with trans fats used to be thought of as a much healthier alternative to butter, but now scientists have proven that to be untrue (Pollan 42). Slowly, the pyramid of lies that the industry has fed people is crashing down. In 2009, more than 400 hundred types of peanut butter-based products were pulled from shelves because of a salmonella scare. The recall was made after eight people died and some 500 others fell ill. This recall was “the latest in a series of increasingly severe food contamination scares involving tomatoes, spinach, cantaloupes and other foods” (Harris). Food is being pushed through processing plants so quickly that sanitation is being compromised.

Industrialized farming is also wreaking havoc on the environment. In 1962 Rachel Carson published her controversial book *Silent Spring*. This book, which is now almost fifty years old, outlined the devastating effects of pesticides and herbicides. Carson writes of a particular incident in eastern Illinois (1954), where both the United States Department of Agriculture and the Illinois Agriculture Department teamed up in hopes of eradicating the Japanese beetle before it could penetrate any further west. After six years of spraying, “every species of wild mammal known to inhabit the area had suffered losses,” yet the beetle continued to spread (Carson 95). Because insects have such short life spans, they are able to mutate and become immune to pesticides faster than animals higher up on the food chain. As the insects become immune, more pesticides of higher potencies are needed to remain effective. This has led to the contamination of hundreds of bodies of water, the devastation of some species, and deaths of workers who are continuously exposed (Carson 137). The industrialization of farming may have brought about higher quantities of food for lower prices, but only at the cost of contaminating food supplies and devastating ecosystems.

Another problem with the industrialization of agriculture is how it disconnects people with the food chain. The questions around diner aren't
what’s growing in the garden or even what’s in season, but rather what do you feel like having. I recently finished Barbara Kingsolver’s book Animal, Vegetable, Miracle, in which her nineteen-year-old daughter writes a passage about the seasonality of food. She says, “[m]ost of us agree to put away our sandals and bikinis when the leaves start to turn, even if they’re our favorite clothes. We can learn to apply similar practicality to our foods” (311). Having bananas, apples, and oranges year-round is a luxury most people take for granted. Because of limited growing seasons throughout most of the United States “the average American foodstuff travels an estimated 1,500 miles before being consumed” (“Fossil Fuel”). This means that as oil prices continue to rise, so will those of food. By making the choice to eat locally now, the appropriate markets will be in place when oil prices result in supermarket prices exceeding those of small local farmers.

For all the years that large farms have triumphed, their way of production has slowly trickled down to the little guys. Today farms are run more like businesses and less like farms because consumers expect that type of relationship. Only now that problems with industrialized farming are becoming harder to ignore, small farms are being asked to operate once again like farms. Customers come to our farm and want to know why the cows aren’t on pasture or if we give them any growth hormones. Our employees stand there puzzled, before responding with either an “I don’t know,” or some kind of over-complicated answer that then leaves the customer puzzled. It has taken time, but we’ve developed brochures that explain our practices and answer some of the most common questions we hear. We hope to expand by creating a self-guided tour of our farm for customers who want a more hands-on learning experience. Just like industrialization didn’t happen overnight, the switch back won’t either. Luckily, organizations are popping up everywhere to help restore the intimate connection between customer and farmer once again.

In 2002, Tracey Ryder and Carole Topalian published their first newsletter entitled Edible Ojai. Today, Edible Communities has grown to include sixty different publications ranging across the United States and into Canada. Each magazine encompasses what can happen when consumers are connected “with family farmers, growers, chefs, and food artisans of all kinds” (Ryder, 3). When I sit down with the newest edition of Edible
Rhody (the publication for Rhode Island), I make sure I have time to read the whole thing cover to cover. Each article tells the stories of other farms like my own, who are pushing to provide their neighbors and friends with the best quality of food possible. Tracey Ryder, cofounder of Edible Communities, describes the stories as being “heartfelt, honest, and sincere” (3). For the past several months I have been planning my garden. I had hoped to start all my own seeds, but that has been a challenge since I’m living in a dorm room with one window. While reading the latest issue of Edible Rhody I learned about Southside Community Land Trust’s (SCLT) Annual Rare and Unusual Plant sale. The sale will offer “hundreds of varieties of annuals, perennials, and fruit and vegetable plant starts” (“Plant Sale”). The SCLT and other neighboring farms raise all the plants organically in Rhode Island. These are exactly the types of plants I want in my garden. Edible Communities provide a colorful, easy-to-read guide that makes seeking local products and community a breeze.

Farm Fresh Rhode Island is the state’s own personal “hub for fresh, healthy food.” This non-profit organization strives to create “[a] New England abundant with diverse family farms and fertile soils, with locally and honestly produced foods and flavors at the heart of every dinner table” (“About Farm”). Their extensive website provides each RI-based farm with its own webpage, bio, and detailed list of products. The organization also runs several farmers’ markets in the state. This year the winter farmer’s market became so popular it was expanded to two days a week. One of their most popular programs is Market Mobile, which connects forty different farms and producers with chefs, grocers, hospitals, and schools throughout Rhode Island and eastern Massachusetts. Buyers are able to go online and find a list of the products available that week, place an order, and have it delivered to their business (“Market Mobile”). By expanding into business territory, Market Mobile is paving the way for local food to become the norm everywhere.

As the demand for local food increases so does the need for farmers. Recently, Dr. B. Donahue, an agricultural historian, came to my Sustainable Living class to talk about the future of farming in New England. He focused on whether or not New England would be able to sustain itself by producing food locally if the need ever arose. I stress need
because wanting and hoping that everyone will eat locally isn’t enough. I was shocked by his findings because I would have assumed it wasn’t possible, but it is. There would have to be some changes to diet, and for all realistic purposes he proposed importing about half of our fruits because most people wouldn’t be happy giving up oranges. He concluded his talk by raising the final question of where these new farmers would come from. A friend I met in the class who plans on converting his father’s hog business into a more sustainable farm looked at me and we smiled. Donahue answered by saying, “[t]hese farmers are my students and others like you (pointing at class).” The rise in interest in farming is producing a whole new generation of educated farmers who are conscious of the devastating effects of industrialized farming and excited to develop new techniques.

There used to be a lot of farmers in this country, and there could be once again if given the chance to succeed. It’s important that both consumers and farmers work to rebuild the relationship that allowed my great-grandparents to prosper throughout the Great Depression. Wendell Berry said that “once our personal connection to what is wrong becomes clear, then we have to choose: we can go on as before, recognizing our dishonesty and living with it the best we can, or we can begin the effort to change the way we think and live” (19). Every time a cone of ice cream is being licked, a block of cheese is being grated, or a perspiring glass of milk is being drank—somewhere a cow is being milked. Whether purchasing these products made with milk from a local family farm—creating and supporting a stronger community—or from a corporate farm with no face is your consumer choice. Make the right one.

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THE EIGHTH RING OF HELL

Alison Tenhulzen

The pungent stench of manure permeates the air as cattle are prodded through crowded chutes. Incessant whistling, yelling, and the grating sounds of machinery throw the cows into a panic as they are led to their inevitable fate: a bolt shot into the brain, (hopefully) stunning them before they are hoisted onto a hook and transported inside. Inside is equally chaotic, equally grim. Strung-out employees rush to perform their given task, be it slitting the animal’s throat, ripping out the intestines, or skinning the head, each man fearful of falling behind on the production line. They should slow down. They should take more time to perform the job well. But they can’t. The supervisors are watching, not for quality of work but for quantity. Because time is money. And this is repeated anywhere from eight to twelve hours a day, seven days a week. This is the modern day slaughterhouse, and it’s not a pretty sight.

Slaughterhouses have been an integral piece of America’s agricultural and industrial history, revolutionizing the production of meat and creating a multi-billion dollar industry. But that doesn’t mean they have achieved their success with integrity. The animals are treated like objects and the workers are treated like animals, but as long as the company that owns the slaughterhouse makes a profit, all is well. The slaughterhouse industry is run on the basis of capitalism, which creates an environment filled with greed and corruption, and one that impacts the quality of both the animals’ and the employees’ treatment. When most people think of slaughterhouses, gruesome images revealing cows skinned alive and chickens crushed against walls come to mind. But while the handling of the animals definitely needs drastic reformation, working conditions for the slaughterhouse employees also present a glaring flaw in the industry.

Psychological problems, injuries, deaths—all of these taint the industry and create a living hell for the employees, many of whom rely on this
measly salary to make a living. Working in a slaughterhouse is considered the most dangerous job in America, and rightfully so. In the book *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser tells of the hazardous setting that slaughterhouses present for their employees: “Every year about one out of three meatpacking workers in this country – roughly forty-three thousand men and women – suffer an injury or a work-related illness that requires medical attention beyond first aid” (Schlosser 172). The constant repetitive motion of butchering, slicing, cutting, or sawing at a fast-paced speed causes most employees to get cumulative trauma injuries, such as carpal tunnel syndrome, back and shoulder aches, or tendonitis. Employees also receive potentially fatal lacerations from knives or can get knocked to the ground by carcasses swinging from the production line (Schlosser 173). But most of these injuries go unnoticed.

In his research, Schlosser found that many employees are under immense pressure from their supervisors to withhold injury reports because the annual bonuses of these supervisors are often based on the factory’s injury rate. But “instead of creating a safer workplace, these bonus schemes encourage slaughterhouse managers to make sure that accidents and injuries go unreported” (Schlosser 175). It may seem strange and unethical that the workers appear to be so disposable, but frankly, they are. Many of them are illegal immigrants with no training for their position in the slaughterhouse. And since they depend on the money they receive from their jobs, the slaughterhouse essentially owns them. In Gail Eisnitz’s book *Slaughterhouse: The Shocking Story of Greed, Neglect, and Inhumane Treatment Inside the U.S. Meat Industry*, she reveals personal interviews she conducted with slaughterhouse employees. They expose the true happenings inside the workplace. Countless employees emerge from their position at the slaughterhouse with mental and physical problems brought on by the incessant killing of living beings all day. One employee exclaimed, “[t]hey come out with carpal tunnel, tendonitis, alcoholism, you name it, because they’re put under incredible pressure and they’re expected to perform under intolerable conditions. Or they develop a sadistic sense of reality” (Eisnitz 94).

The psychological effects slaughterhouse employees experience can have an even greater impact than physical effects. In the article “A
Slaughterhouse Nightmare: Psychological Harm Suffered by Slaughterhouse Employees and the Possibility of Redress through Legal Reform,” author Jennifer Dillard examines cases of employees who undergo psychological damage from the work performed in their jobs. There are many cases of workers being haunted by severe recurring dreams of the slaughterhouse, and substance abuse is very prevalent in slaughterhouse employees. As one former employee revealed, “[a] lot of [slaughterhouse hog killers] have problems with alcohol. They have to drink, they have no other way of dealing with killing live, kicking animals all day long. If you stop and think about it, you’re killing several thousand beings a day” (Dillard 397). The constant killing causes the employees to become numb to this brutal act, desensitizing them to violence, not only towards animals but to other people as well. Counties with slaughterhouses report higher rates of sexual assault, murder, rape, robbery, larceny, and arson, suggesting the comfort level of committing crimes is higher among slaughterhouse employees (Dillard 400-401). Workers are subjected to the torturous act of killing all day, and unless they want to lose their source of income, they can’t do anything about it. A former employee that Gail Eisnitz interviewed confessed, “[p]igs down on the kill floor have come up and nuzzled me like a puppy. Two minutes later I had to kill them – beat them to death with a pipe. I can’t care” (Eisnitz 87).

The more obvious and well-publicized offense of slaughterhouses is the blatant mistreatment of animals. Cattle, pigs, chickens, and sheep are shuttled in by the thousands and held in cramped, disorienting pens while being prodded and beat by employees, causing the animals much stress even before they are slaughtered. It is also common for the livestock to be able to see, hear, and smell the slaughter of their comrades, adding to the animals’ distraught nature. According to Happier Meals: Rethinking the Global Meat Industry, penned by Danielle Nierenberg, these methods of slaughtering animals, while faster, don’t help the quality of the meat or make more profit: research indicates that the final meat product is less tender when the animal experienced stress before slaughter. The rough and abusive handling of the animals can also cause bruises in the meat, which lowers the price approximately $60-$70 per head (Nierenberg 21-23). There are also countless horror stories about animals going through the
production line while fully conscious: pigs going through the scalding tank and having their hooves ripped off before their throat is even slit; cows getting their heads stuck under gate guards, with cutting off their heads the only way to get them out; the list goes on and on (Eisnitz 130, 266). Greater precautions need to be taken to ensure the animals are completely stunned before slaughter, for no creature should have to experience that suffering.

With all of these malpractices occurring within the slaughterhouse system, it is difficult to introduce a solution that will completely reform the industry. But many people are coming up with innovative methods to improve the treatment of the employees and the animals. In my ideal world, everyone would live a vegetarian lifestyle, thus completely eradicating slaughterhouses altogether. While many would argue that the purge of the slaughterhouse industry would cause the loss of thousands of jobs and have too great an impact on the economy, these former slaughterhouse jobs could just be re-established in another industry. If vegetarianism grew in popularity, there would be many more employment opportunities related to the growth and sales of fresh produce.

For those who argue that the human population simply won’t accept a meatless diet, there have been revolutionary advancements in biotechnology, enabling the growth of meat without slaughtering thousands of animals. While the idea of growing meat in a lab can sound slightly sickening, the potential that this so called “carniculture” has is immense. The animals would no longer have to suffer through the process of being slaughtered, animal rights activists would get their wish of no animals harmed, and the meat-loving portion of the population would still get to gorge themselves on beef, chicken, and fish. Of course, scientists have yet to reach the point where they are growing filet mignons in a Petri dish, but they are making progress. The article “Vegetarian Meat: Could Technology Save Animals and Satisfy Meat Eaters?” written by Patrick D. Hopkins and Austin Dacey, details the many processes of developing meat in a laboratory, some currently in use, some more tentative. One of the methods is called scaffolding, where skeletal muscle cells can be grown on small beads or on mesh suspended in a growth medium, some of which can even stretch to simulate motion and firm up the resulting meat. Cells then fuse to form fibers
that can eventually be harvested as meat (Hopkins 582). At the moment, this can only produce soft meats, such as ground beef, but as technology advances, more complicated meats could be developed.

Another technique using self-organizing tissue cultures presents a lot of promise in the production of meat. Scientists took slices of goldfish tissue, placed them in Petri dishes in a nutrient medium, and let them grow for seven days. Different nutrient mediums resulted in varying amounts of growth, but the tissue that was grown in a mixture of goldfish skeletal muscle tissue grew a remarkable 79% in a week’s time. After these seven days, the scientists had newly grown meat that looked like fresh fish filets one would find at the grocery store (Hopkins 582-583). While this technique isn’t foolproof yet—fish were still killed—the fact that a serving size of fish could be conjured from a few slices of tissue is exciting.

Another solution is the idea of humane slaughterhouses. While it is difficult for a slaughterhouse to be completely humane, there are many ways the treatment of animals could be improved. Temple Grandin, a professor from Colorado State University, has created methods to encourage more humane slaughter. On her website, she illustrates in detail a multitude of alternative slaughtering procedures that focus on the wellbeing of the animals before they are sent into the slaughterhouse. Grandin has designed chutes through which the livestock are transported to get to the slaughterhouse that are enclosed and have curved corners, which caters to livestock’s natural tendency to circle back to where they came from (Grandin). She also stresses the importance of stunning the animals properly before slaughter, and details the correct technique on her website. This approach to slaughterhouse ethics is very reasonable and can be easily incorporated into the current slaughterhouse system, and it’s favorable for the meat industry as well. Grandin isn’t fighting to close down all slaughterhouses. She simply desires for the animals to receive more humane treatment in the last hours of their lives.

In regard to fair treatment of employees, not much progress has been made due to the monopolistic power the meat industry possesses over government organizations, but that doesn’t mean solutions aren’t out there. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) is responsible for protecting American workers from workplace hazards, but it has not
yet addressed the problem of psychological problems in the workplace (Dillard 403). If OSHA developed a system of regulations for psychological safety in slaughterhouses, such as conducting inspections for safety violations and then imposing fines for violating such regulations, employees could reap the benefits of the stricter rules. But OSHA has a very poor track record of protecting slaughterhouse workers, which diminishes reliance on the administration for improving work conditions. Easily influenced by large sums of money, which the slaughterhouse industry just so happens to have, the government has been determined to reduce OSHA’s authority, allowing slaughterhouses to get away with more illegal activities. During the 1980s, funds for OSHA were decreased, and the number of slaughterhouse inspectors was cut by twenty percent, which led to the new policy of “voluntary compliance.” This means that instead of OSHA employees showing up at slaughterhouses unannounced and performing an inspection, they are required to look at the company’s injury log before scheduling an inspection appointment. If the log shows that the factory’s injury rates are lower than the national average, the OSHA inspector is not allowed to even set foot in the slaughterhouse (Schlosser 179). This only fuels the cover-up of employee injuries and encourages bribery of government officials to deregulate slaughterhouse inspections.

When it comes to injuries in the workplace, the obvious solutions are to slow the pace of the production line and to educate the workers on with the proper and safe use of the tools. But once again, these things take time, and time is money. In an industry that runs solely on the desire for profit, it’s difficult to completely re-establish a new focus, such as healthy workers producing healthy meat. In order for that to happen, practically every supervisor, every manager, and every CEO would have to be removed from the industry and replaced with individuals who are proven to have good intentions. But even if that were to happen, there would still be the lobbyists fighting for the deregulation of slaughterhouse inspections. So essentially, lobbyists would have to be banned from influencing government officials. While this will be a difficult task since lobbyists hold so much power in the government, there could be hope. When President Obama was running for office in 2008, he refused to accept any donations from lobbyists, and “the Democratic National Committee took up the ban as
well when the Illinois lawmaker became the presumptive nominee” states Jennifer Haberkorn in her article “Biden, Obama at Odds Over Lobbyist Donations.” If Obama continues his refusal of lobbyist donations, hopefully his influence could spread, decreasing slaughterhouse bribes and increasing quality of worker treatment.

Slaughterhouses may be corrupt, putrid places that are contaminated with greed and unethical treatment of both animals and humans. But with proper initiative, conditions can be improved, and one day the animals won’t be skinned alive and the employees won’t slice off appendages with frantically flying knives.

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Part II

Preface

Unit IV: The TBA

One of the unique strengths of the College Writing 112 curriculum is its flexibility. Unit IV offers teachers (and students) a space to create projects that address themes, questions, and rhetorical situations of their own choosing. Although these assignments continue to build on the skills of critical thinking, cultural analysis, responding and revising that have been so important throughout the semester, they also provide occasions to address new audiences, discover additional genres, and analyze texts outside of our required reading materials.

Our teachers and students have been remarkably creative in rising to this challenge. They have produced ethnographies, candid guides to life at UMass, and letters to President Obama. They have written about subjects as diverse as location, sexuality, food, popular music, and the 1990s. Sometimes they focus on issues of local importance, getting students to speak out on issues that directly impact the communities of which we are a part. On occasion, they examine topics they have previously explored in greater depth or using different rhetorical strategies. Whatever the Unit IV assignment, it is certain to be timely, open-ended, and thought-provoking. And it is fitting that the last formal unit of the semester presents our students with an assignment that orients them not just towards fellow students and academics, but towards the world at large.
A COLORFUL NEW PERSPECTIVE

Ava Benjamin

Unit IV: Assignment Description
Students were asked to combine the goals of Unit I and Unit III, that is, to write a paper that addressed a personal context with the support of research conducted by scholars.

Each letter, in my mind, is associated with a specific color, and that color remains constant. If you asked me to name the color variation of “H” in two months, I would tell you exactly what I’m saying now: yellow. This phenomenon, which generally occurs in between 1 in 200 and 1 in 20,000 people, is called “synesthesia.” The term is derived from the Greek “syn,” meaning together, and “aesthesia,” meaning sensation. Technically, according to Timothy Ely and Terence McKenna, “[i]t is used to denote a condition in which stimulation in one sensory modality also gives rise to an experience in a different modality” (3). For example, my personal experience has been that instead of reading a sentence and simply absorbing the information, I see a slew of colors in my mind that correspond with letters and numbers on the page. The only way I can describe it is like fireworks: many flashes of brightness all at once. An accurate representation of what I, personally, see can be found by watching the “visualizer” on iTunes.

For me, some words have one color, such as the word “one,” while others, like “synesthesia,” have separate blocks of color. And then there are the long, rarely used words like “trombone” that are colored according to each individual letter. According to scientists Ophelia Deroy and Dominique Valentin, who have studied synesthesia and how it is sometimes perceived, “[s]ome [senses] hold between apparently disconnected features like musical instruments and basic tastes, or pitches and flavors” (1). This could mean that when a synesthete hears a hand clap, their mind produces sensations of orange, or may even cause one to smell a specific scent.
associated with that sound. Such dramatic responses are rarely seen, as links between completely different senses (like taste and sight) are sparse, even in synesthetes.

Loud noises appear to me as vividly colored explosions, and soft ones as subdued, pastel blobs, almost like spray paint. I have recently discovered that the reason I hate fireworks is because the obnoxiously loud noises they make produce overwhelming color responses in my mind. These are difficult to process, and cause me panic as I try to block out the internal explosion and take in the beautiful one in the sky. In addition, certain singing voices or pitches make me feel sick to my stomach, while others that I may find beautiful cause my chest physically to hurt. My theory on this matter is that when I hear a sound that I really love or intensely despise, my mind automatically tries to recreate it. This sensation is often uncomfortable, which is why I can’t listen to Carrie Underwood or most other country music singers. My synesthesia links noises, pitches, and tones directly to my physical senses, mostly inside my body, without any warning or control.

In terms of the similarities between letters and the colors they correspond to, research suggests that this concept is valid. For example, according to David Brang, a scientist in this area of study:

Results of synesthetes’ grapheme–color correspondences indeed revealed that more similarly shaped graphemes corresponded with more similar synesthetic colors, with stronger effects observed in individuals with more intense synesthetic experiences (projector synesthetes). (1357)

This insight could mean that the way I see each color actually has a pattern. Though I do not see one in examining my personal illustration, Brang’s research has shown otherwise.

According to an article by Christine Cadena, synesthesia is mostly seen in left-handed people, and the ratio of women to men is 6:1. Her report also suggests that people affected by synesthesia are incredibly creative, and commonly go on to become artists (Cadena). There are quite a few famous people who have been affected by synesthesia: Jimi Hendrix, Marilyn
Monroe, Pythagoras, John Mayer, and Stevie Wonder, to name a few “Famous People”. Their creative talents allow(ed) them to view their work in very different ways, making what they did, or still do, beautiful and revolutionary.

My learning is relatively influenced by my synesthesia. When memorizing words or phrases, I will often associate each one with a color or combination of colors depending on which pop into my mind when I read the word. This way, when I need to remember it again in the future, I can associate my automatic response with the desired definition. It’s not a huge help, but it does contribute to my memorization skills. In my case, it all derives from graphemes, which are terms for any type of writing in any language. These are linked to numerous neurological disorders such as dyslexia, a recurring confusion involving graphemes and phonemics (Golden).

Synesthesia can also result from physical trauma, usually to the head. For example, Rita Addison was in a car accident, and following this, synesthesia actually set in. According to her, “[s]mells, absent at first, returned distorted . . . Sound wasn't heard but felt, like a push into [her] skin. With aphasia and vocabulary loss, frustration mounted whenever [she] tried to use words to explain what [her] world was like” (Gibbs 49). Addison’s failure to verbalize what she was seeing and feeling is perfectly conveyed through her quote; only synesthetes themselves can successfully comprehend what is happening in their own minds, a fact that can often get frustrating, as in her case. She dealt with this discontentment by creating an art exhibit that visually displays roughly what she sees.

Not only can synesthesia can take on many different forms, but it can also elicit emotions in the person experiencing it depending on the “aura” a grapheme is emanating. One scientist explains that, “[s]ynesthetes who experience grapheme-color synesthesia often report feeling uneasy when dealing with incongruently colored graphemes” (Callejas). In other words, when a synesthete who usually sees the word “dog” in this color (brown) sees it instead in green, she may feel a sense of discomfort. In her mind, it should be brown, simply because it is brown. Any other color is incorrect and stressful.

A relative study also also by Callejas shows a similar result in terms of a synesthete’s performance when confronted with “incorrect” col-
ors. According to the data, “when a word is presented in a color different from that in which a particular synesthete experiences it, the incongruence between the perceptual stimulus and the internal experience gives rise to an affective reaction that biases the synesthete’s performance.” This is something I, as a synesthete, can relate to. My perception of and an affinity for colors was apparent even as a child. In school I would write my sentences each in a different shade. My choices of color were not random, but rather consistent for the tone and topic of my writing. At that point I did not know I had synesthesia. In fact, I did not know until the age of 15, when my mother mentioned hearing something on the radio about people who could consistently associate colors with letters, and sometimes even smelled and tasted things when confronted with a completely different sense. That’s when I realized what I could do was not so common.

Unfortunately, there is no “synesthesia club” on the UMass campus, which is slightly disappointing. It’s not a huge deal, but it would be interesting to hear other synesthetes’ experiences with the condition, as people who can relate are hard to come by. My hope is maybe to start a club, as well as educate people on the phenomenon that is synesthesia. In the past, I have used aspects of my synesthesia in art for school, and I would like to bring a similar sort of theme to the UMass campus.

There are thousands of ways that synesthesia can be present in a person. Some are literally disruptive to everyday life, such as the kind where a noise causes a person to see colors in front of their eyes that impede vision. Others, like my own, are benign and often enjoyable. I would love to discuss the condition with someone else who can fully understand it, but I have yet to find another synesthete. Apart from the fact that it is a downright interesting condition to learn about, my issue with synesthesia’s representation on the UMass campus is that there is none. It is by no means a major issue in my life, but it does make finding other people who can relate extremely difficult. This very unrepresented condition is intriguing, while at the same time indescribable, making it a perfect subject for research and further discourse.
A Colorful New Perspective

Works Cited


A COMPLETELY CONSCIOUS AND DELICIOUS EXPERIENCE:
THE GOOD TASTES OF EARTHFOODS CAFÉ

Sophia Carreras

Carreras and her peers were asked to write a food and culture essay about a particular food, eatery, or market that we may come across at UMass Amherst. Together, their essays made up a printed collection called “Good Eats, Good Company: The Culture of Food at UMass Amherst.” By bringing together our course’s emphasis on using vivid description, use of selective research, and cultural analysis to engage readers, the collection conveys the experience of being a patron at that eatery or market and comments more broadly on how our good eats reflect UMass culture. In the following piece, Carreras invites those in the UMass community into Earthfoods.

Vegetables or animal brutality: this is how some people view the choice between being vegetarian and vegan, or eating meat. Being a “veg head,” as some call it, is not simply a meal-by-meal decision, but an entire lifestyle. So it’s not a surprise that it can be hard to find supportive, entirely veggie-friendly places, especially on a college campus. In fact, I had never even considered that such a place might exist until one fateful day when I wandered through the Student Union. But since UMass Amherst offers eclectic niches for all kinds of students, like a beacon of light, there it was. In big, artsy looking letters, the sign on the doorway read, “Earthfoods,” and inside I found an entirely eco-conscious, hippie welcoming world.

As soon as I walked in, I was overcome with a warming sensation of calm, as the entire vibe of the place was perfectly mellow. With its yellow
walls, and the gorgeous tapestries that hung from them, Earthfoods seemed to glow with an overarching feeling of well-being. One thing that struck me was how simply everything was laid out. Twenty round tables stand in the middle of one big room, with a few high rises along the walls for more intimate seating. The scenery was comfortable enough, but the real question remained: was the food worth sitting down for?

One big black board lays out the day’s healthy goods and specials, highlighting a chili dish, Smokey Red Pepper Soup, and Down Home Cornbread. Then you move on to the main line, with a counter housing a number of pans, each containing some scrumptious and healthy dish doled out buffet style. Another wonderful thing about the restaurant is that they always have classic vegan sides such as kale, broccoli, and spinach to accompany the main dishes. To be completely honest, I’m not even a vegetarian. Yes, I said it; I do eat meat. But in the end, the idea that I ordered a dish consisting of only vegetables and thoroughly enjoyed it shows the magic of Earthfoods. This little not-for-profit organization completely nullifies the common misconception that vegan food is bland and unappetizing, and instead opens the customer’s eyes to a new world of healthy, earthy, but also yummy foods.

Looking at the menu, I felt like I was in a new world. I had never considered how to make an entire meal filling and enjoyable when it has that vegan stamp on it. I mean, I could put cheese on almost anything. Also, there weren’t any recognizable dishes in sight, so I was a bit lost at first. I always pictured vegans sitting in their gardens eating carrots and sprouts out of the ground, but when I looked around at everyone sitting down with heaping plates of food, I realized this image was completely wrong. So I decided to put myself at the mercy of Earthfoods’ pilots. I told the kind looking young woman behind the main line that it was my first time eating there and asked what I should try.

“Ah, well the jambalaya’s getting rave reviews today! And you can have any of the sides like spinach, broccoli, or a veggie mix,” she told me, taking off each lid to show me everything that was laid out. So I took her word for it, got a helping of jambalaya, which was much bigger than I expected, and received an equally large serving of broccoli for my side dish. From there I made my way to a table in the middle of the room and settled down to indulge in the healthy goodness I had just ordered for myself.
Taking the first few bites, I couldn’t help but notice how colorful my plate was. With bright green broccoli on one side, and the veggie jambalaya with its bold red, yellow, and orange color on the other, I realized how gorgeous vegetables can be just by themselves. I’ve always loved broccoli, so no worries there. But it was time to take my first brave spoonful of jambalaya, hoping it wouldn’t taste like the vegetables I sometimes scrape off my plate when I’m done eating. So I gathered my courage, grabbed my fork, and took a bite.

Like an unexpected gift, the flavor was incredible! It was savory but also sweet from the tomatoes, a bit spicy from the seasoning, and unexpectedly delicious. Thoroughly enjoying the food, I didn’t realize how filling it was. Before I knew it, I was stuffed and had to pack up the other half—I was too full to eat. I had officially experienced the misconceived world of vegan cuisine: that it can be yummy while also being super healthy.

Of course the food is an important aspect of Earthfoods, but what I found interesting and inviting about it is the outlook and aura of the people who work and eat there. Right off the bat, everyone is so friendly and willing to strike up a conversation. It’s not just a stereotype; most of the people there are, objectively, earthy-crunchy hippies. Sitting down, eating my meal, I couldn’t help but notice all of the political and earth-conscious stickers plastered over everyone’s laptops. I also didn’t see one brand-labeled shirt. In a nutshell, this place is “hipsterville.” The alternative radio station playing in the People’s Market down the hall echoes into the room just loud enough to be heard over meal time chatter. And, at the risk of putting myself into that hipster box, the music being played were all songs I love, but ones none of my friends know. Basically, I had found my heaven and I knew I would be back soon.

Once I got past the relaxing atmosphere and generally accepting vibe of the room itself, the underlying current pulsing through Earthfoods became blatantly clear. This is a place for people who are searching out an ecologically and socially conscious place to buy their food. As Dr. Stanley M. Sapon details in his *Philosophy of Vegan Values*, “everything we do connects to something else; every action touches on the world around us, either close at hand and noticeable, or far away and unperceived, immediate in its effect or distant in time” (Sapon). Staying true to these values, Earthfoods is the heart of UMass’s hippie soul. This café is a place for students who are,
or want to become, conscious of the food it provides, and care about the preservation of the earth itself. All of the items on the menu are completely organic and locally grown. This is an important aspect of UMass culture, because more of the food being served in the dining commons comes from local farms. At this café, rest assured that the money you paid for your meal is helping to sustain the local economy, and holds true to Earthfoods’ “not for profit” promise. Ultimately, each decision made by Earthfoods’ leaders is a mindful one.

The price of Earthfoods’ to-go containers, forty-cents each, exemplifies this awareness. Now, in some cases, I could venture to guess that customers in other restaurants may be somewhat outraged at this. I mean, it’s just a box right? Wrong, and Earthfoods agrees. Think about how many boxes are doled out every day to customers, for free, to stash their extra food in. The problem with this is that consumers don’t think twice about how much waste the containers produce. It’s just handed to them, so why question it? This is the kind of wasteful thinking that Earthfoods hits head on. Never before have I heard of a restaurant that recommends to its customers, on its homepage no less, to bring Tupperware to take their food home in. But Earthfoods is serious about preservation and sustainability.

Even if you are going only for the tasty food, there’s really no way of escaping the consciousness that Earthfoods embodies, and the feeling of well-being that comes along with it. Nourishing the body, mind, and spirit, this little café on campus is a perfect place to calm down and keep things in check. Being aware of the earth and the ways in which we interact with it are more important now than ever, so having a place like this on campus is not only a luxury but a necessity. A reflection of UMass Amherst’s drive to create niches for all of its diverse students, Earthfoods is a unique option for people searching out a healthy, eco-friendly place to dine.

Work Cited
Students were assigned to interview someone over the age of fifty to discover what life was like in a generation earlier than their own. The author had to create the questions to ask, edit the content of their conversation and determine the physical layout of their text for printing. They were also tasked with researching some of the unfamiliar context that emerged from the interview.

Grandpa Moe walks cautiously into the house, dressed in a coat and rally cap. He is reluctant to sit in the kitchen, knowing full well of the interview I plan to give him. Luring him in is the fresh homemade pasta and meatballs, put at the table by my grandmother and being joyously eaten by the rest of the family. He sits down on the stool next to me, a chair that evokes the time Grandpa Moe had spent in bars. Grandpa Moe gives me a wide-eyed look, the scent of beer on his breath.

“I’m not doing this right now, Joe. I’m drunk,” said Grandpa Moe.

“Actually Grandpa, you are. You said you would, and I’m not letting you get out of it.”

“I can’t do this . . . I’m drunk.”

“That sounds like a personal problem. You ready to start?”

Realizing that it is no use getting away from me, he resigns to his fate and agrees to answer my questions, my grandmother backing him up.

I decided to go about this chronologically, starting with his teen years. In the early 1950’s, at the young age of fifteen, Moe joined a gang called “The Vikings,” which held about seventeen “like-minded individuals, whose parents didn’t really care where we went or what we did; we found family in each other.” The group built a little clubhouse out of stolen wood from an old lumberyard. They lived in this shelter on warmer days and rented out rooms in other houses for only about three dollars on colder days. The same lumberyard was a great place to go to find wood to create
makeshift bows and arrows, which The Vikings sometimes used as weapons, though not as often as the far deadlier “zip gun.”

The gang was no stranger to violence. “Three of them died by zip guns, one was knifed, and another one was killed by a baseball bat,” my grandfather recalled, looking down at his pasta.

“Do you keep in contact with any of the others in the gang?” I asked, anticipating the answer that would come next. “They are all dead now. I’m the last one,” Moe responded, clearly not enjoying the topic.

He went on to explain his own role in the gang. He was more of a peacemaker than a violent member. He got along with everyone in the gang, and got along with the outside community as well, often garnering respect for his ability to drink large quantities of alcohol.

After his gang life, he applied to join the Marines on a buddy system with two friends. Unfortunately, Moe was the only one without a criminal record, and therefore joined the Marines alone as a cook in 1956. Stationed at Parris Island in South Carolina, Moe was insubordinate to his superiors and loved by his peers: “I made everyone laugh by poking fun at the officers and doing good impressions. They’d try to punish me by making me do laps around the island or do pushups, but they couldn’t break me.”

While in the military, Moe witnessed an injustice that would end his career. As a cook, he was paired up with another cook in the kitchen, who happened to be a black man. It was time to go home, and Moe was ready to close up. “I called out to him, ‘Come on, let’s go home, we’re done here,’

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1 Zip guns were a bit of tubing that had an elastic band that could be used as a firing pin and a little trigger mechanism. When hitting the trigger, it would set off the elastic band into a .22 caliber bullet, causing it to go off and shoot out of the tube into a target.

2 In 1950s Boston, youth gangs weren’t uncommon, nor as violent or as dangerous as Moe’s gang. They rarely used firearms or engaged in fights involving serious injury, unlike most gangs today. As a matter of fact, most fighting took place within the gangs than between them, and most legal offenses were relatively mild. This collaborates that Moe really was a peacemaker, then, because a single person mediating between two parties could resolve issues that were actually trivial.

3 The buddy system would allow two or more people to stick together when they signed up, allowing the transition into the military to be easier and more appealing.
I DID IT MY WAY

and he told me his officer wouldn’t let him. I was like ‘Whaddaya mean? Whaddaya mean your boss won’t let you?’ and it was because he was black.” Moe nearly had a nervous breakdown over this; he went to the cook’s superior and yelled at him, and then ultimately threw a machete at him.

He was sent to a hospital where they tried to give him a medical discharge, but “I didn’t leave until I was given an honorable discharge for bipolar.” He was in the military for only one year.

After the military, an entertainment manager on a cruise ship approached Moe after hearing him sing at a bar once, asking him to take up a position singing onboard. It was a new experience for him, and he enjoyed it immensely. He indulged himself with the luxuries of cruise ship life, such as a free bar and plenty of interesting people to talk to.

Two weeks in, he was singing on stage like he was supposed to, except he was absolutely plastered. “They fired me because I was drunk and broke the sound equipment, and I was kicked off when we returned home.”

Back in Boston once again, Moe became a firefighter, which was more respected then than it is today. Proud of this, he stayed with it for twenty years until he retired after falling through a roof. Throughout his time as a firefighter, he displayed acts of courage and generosity, once giving his own television to someone who had lost everything in a house fire. Despite this, one day they asked too much.

“There was a warehouse that was empty with a huge fire, and they wanted me to go in and put it out. I told them, ‘No way. I don’t get paid enough for this shit, the rats are running out! There is no one to save so I ain’t running in there,’ and I didn’t.” Moe, who had been in the fire department for a long time by this point, faced no real repercussions for his refusal to go in.

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4 The fire department in those decades had to face a lot more fires than we do now. Unlike then, building codes are now more up to date, and there is more fireproof material used in construction. In the early 1980’s, Boston experienced 600 arson fires, until an arson ring was caught and convicted for its crimes.
Because the majority of his life was in Boston, Moe has been able to see and experience the changes from the 1940s to the present. “I liked it better back then,” he states, focusing again more on his food.

“Why was it better then than now?” I ask, curious as to the details of how Boston developed.

“I . . . I don’t know. I’m too drunk for this right now.” My grandmother helped question him, trying to get some answers. “I didn’t ask to do this,” clearly annoyed at the notion of us wanting him to do some thinking.

After a little more prodding, he finally came through and talked about how the community was different. Everyone trusted each other and talked to one another. Families stayed outside on their stoops to see neighbors throughout the day, and doors weren’t locked today. There were more small businesses and not a lot of large corporations and bureaucracies.

“Grandpa, do you have anything to say to the future generations, or young people specifically?”

“Stay away from substance abuse,” Grandpa Moe said.

“Have any hope for the future?” I asked.

“No, not really.”

“All right, well what would you say was your biggest achievement?”

Grandpa Moe said, “Uh, I don’t know, joining the Marine Corps.”

Given that many of his life’s decisions are questionable by normal standards, I figured I would wrap up the interview by asking what he thought about his past.

“Grandpa, do you have any regrets about your past? If you could do it all again, would you change that or anything?”

“Uh, no, not really. I did it my way.”

In the 1950s and ’60s, immigration was still constantly going on, and neighborhoods tended to fill with people from the same country. Without a language barrier and a community that was bound by the same culture, people felt at home with their own kind and didn’t really diversify as much as Boston neighborhoods did later on. This isn’t really a bad thing, but people aren’t as close to or trusting of their surrounding neighbors as they were back then, when neighborhood pride and loyalty were important.
He drank because he loved it; drinking calmed him down and relieved him of his pains. He loved the bar, the smell, the people, the conversation—the entire environment. Many people may disagree with how he lived his life and what he did with it, but he doesn’t really care. It is a proper ending to this interview that Grandpa Moe quoted one of his favorite songs by Frank Sinatra, one that really embodies him and his life: “I did it my way.”

Although my grandfather missed a significant portion of my life, he definitely had an impact. Listening to his stories and trying to learn what I could from them have used up many summer nights by my pool, where I sat with him while he smoked a cigarette. Although I can’t say I would live life the same way, his attitude towards it is admirable, not caring about regular society’s standards and doing what you want. You only get to live once; he knew how to have a hell of a ride with what he had.

Moe’s adventures when he was younger inspire me to try to step out of my comfort zone. He took risks and made opportunities for himself, afterwards doing what he wanted with them. The rebel in him makes me want to forget about everything for a while, jump on a motorcycle, and try to find my own adventures somewhere, ditching all the plans I have for any future and just living life. Perhaps, through his stories, his life is glorified. But I hope one day I can have interesting tales of my own to pass on to the following generations.

Works Cited


Part II

Preface
The Final Reflection

The last paper students compose in College Writing is called The Final Reflection. While students’ written reflections on their work are an ongoing and critical part of the course, The Final Reflection asks students to review the entire body of work in their portfolios and harvest some of the most important insights they have discovered—about writing and about themselves as writers. By analyzing their struggles, their choices, and their triumphs, they compare their past learning with their present knowledge in order to illuminate where they will need to go as writers in their futures. Learning to write well is a never-ending process, so this reflection is “final” only in the sense of giving some closure to the course. The paper is, in fact, a beginning that launches the student into the world of academic writing. They consider the various “tools” they have assembled in their writer’s “toolbox”: revision, responding to writing, reflecting on writing, writing for an audience, writing with purposefulness, and the consciousness of crafting an idea into a final paper. The Final Reflection casts a light on the challenges students will need to conquer in their futures as academic writers.

These following texts are the result of each student’s unique experience of College Writing. They range from larger insights about the self and about learning to wonderfully pragmatic advice for any writer. We hope you enjoy reading about these students’ journeys through College Writing, and the wisdom they gleaned as they worked throughout the course. Their advice and the insights they share serve as inspiration for us all.
DINNER AND A NOVEL

Caroline Cummings

When you are about to leave for a date, there are certain rituals you might practice. Calm the nerves. Check the mirror. Twice. Check your watch. Anxiously look out the window. Of course, with writing, the rituals differ. You might poise your wrists. Spread your fingers. Organize your thoughts. Type out some nonsense letters to get warmed up. And finally, write. The similarities between the dating and writing are not obvious. Even so, I noticed some connections between the two when I witnessed a friend of mine interacting with a guy she just met. She “searched” (or more accurately, stalked) him on Facebook to learn as much as she could about him, not unlike a writer compiling background research for an essay. This friend would text him on the phone while asking her friends for advice on how to phrase her messages, not unlike how peers proofread and critique each others’ essays. And finally, she would bring him back to the room so that her friends could meet him and decide whether they approved or disapproved, not unlike a writer submitting the final draft of her essay for a grade. And so, writing is a lot like dating. Sure, writing doesn't have the awkward silences or forced laughter that many first dates bring, but these two activities actually do share a lot in common.

First Impressions Are Key (How Am I Doing So Far?)

This is the dater’s chance to shape how the other person feels about her for the duration of their time spent together, whether it be two hours or two years. If the dater is well dressed and has a good smile, this usually makes a good first impression. As long as the dater doesn’t open her mouth and say something dimwitted like “Hey baby, what’s your sign?” she’s almost guaranteed a second date. Similarly, the writer makes a first impression in her opening line. It has to inspire enough interest for the reader to
ensure continued reading. If a reader loses interest, then the writer loses a potentially loyal customer, one that could buy and religiously read everything that the author has ever written (including the obscure underground works that only a few know about). How, you may ask, do you know if your writing will create a good first impression? If it inspires emotion, laughter, or deep thought, that is usually an indicator of a good opening line, and therefore a good first impression.

Preparation Is Necessary

The dater makes many important, possibly life-altering decisions about what to wear, where to go on the date, etc. There is pressure to look attractive, but not trashy. Be smart, but not nerdy. Interesting, but not “eccentric.” Confident, but not egotistical. If you go on your date wearing pajamas and a bed-head, your date will think that you are a mess who just doesn’t care. It’s very similar to a writer considering his or her audience: preparation is imperative. First, the writer needs an intriguing subject matter. Next, an outline. Finally, a rough draft. At this stage, the preparation is almost complete. Of course, a couple things need to happen before your final draft, such as peer review (which is like asking your friends whether you should go for a risqué look with a mini-skirt or a more conservative look with a sweater). Being well prepared, in any context, can instantly boost others’ opinions of you.

It’s All About Confidence

The last thing a dater wants their potential life partner to be is a self-conscious recluse. Being comfortable in one’s own skin is an attractive quality in anybody. Even if, God forbid, a zit were to emerge, leaving the dater feeling like Armageddon had arrived, one must at least fake some amount of confidence if there is to be any hope of a second date. This is why, if any self-doubt has somehow leaked into someone’s writing, the reader will sense it and quickly dismiss what else the writer has to say. Writers should take a stance: they must be able to argue with conviction to be taken seriously.
An Intimate Relationship Is Formed

Further elaboration on the intimacy of two daters should be pretty self-explanatory. They may bond on a spiritual, emotional, or physical level. They may share the same faith, experience the same meaningful emotions, or they might even make out at the end of the date. However, the relationship between a reader and a writer is arguably more profound. Writers share a lot of their innermost thoughts on paper when, as is often the case, they have no idea who will be reading it. Writers put a lot on the line when they publish something that could quite possibly be rejected by their audience. Therefore, there is a certain degree of trust involved when a writer shows someone their work.

So, from this point on, when faced with the task of writing a paper, you may forever compare it to the dating world. The preparation, the first impressions, the (often feigned) confidence, and the relationship with the reader/date. I hope that you, the reader, will take away from this essay the same revelations that I, the writer, discovered while writing this essay. Every piece you write should be treated almost like a significant other. You must be prepared to give your work the time it deserves for it to develop fully. Mistakes will be made: there is no use in thinking otherwise. But your willingness to return to your writing to mend those mistakes means giving it a strength it wouldn’t have otherwise had. Don’t give up when your process begins to slow. Enjoy the process when you can. Do all these things, and at the end of the night you can end up with a main squeeze or, if you’re lucky, one hell of a paper.
Two years ago, as part of a school project, I was visiting a classroom of very young students who were just learning the art of composition. They were working on spelling and their eyes were glazed over. The teacher, noticing this lack of attention, announced they were going to have a break. However, rather than dismissing the students to get a drink, she started handing out small writing books with the students’ names on them. I was confused, but the students seemed excited by this turn of events. They then had a ten minute “fun writing” session where they could write about whatever they wanted. During the break there was virtually no talking and much less of the constant fiddling that seems to go with small children. They loved it! After the session was over, the books were collected and the students went back to work, refreshed and refocused.

After the class I asked the teacher, Mrs. Brown, about the “fun writing” and why it was so popular. Was there some sort of incentive involved with it? Did they get prizes for writing a certain amount? “Oh no,” she responded. “That’s not what fun writing is at all. They just get ten minutes to write about whatever they want to.”

“Does their work get graded?” I asked.

“No,” she said. “They never even have to share it if they don’t want to. Unless they ask me to, I don’t look at the books, and at the end of the year they get to take the books home.”

“So why do they like it so much?” I asked.

“They just love to write,” she answered.

These students weren’t part of any gifted class, nor did they come from a particularly wordy background. The teacher didn’t make the “fun writing” session enjoyable. It was fun by its very nature. It was just time for the kids to write whatever they wanted to without instructions from the
teacher. This led me to a rather startling conclusion: kids naturally love to write.

Many would find that to be a preposterous claim. I’ve known countless people who have told me that they just can’t stand writing. They’ll sit in front of their computer for hours writing the simplest of papers and end the project with something close to emotional trauma. Why is this? How can it be that a group of small children just learning to write can find it to be a lovely treat, while older and presumably wiser students would rather take a punch to the gut than write a few thousand words?

It’s clear to me now that there are multiple reasons why these young children loved to write. When they had time to write, they really wrote. They wrote with a reckless abandon, paying no attention to distractions like grammar and spelling. They could write about whatever they wanted, however they wanted. They were always pushing their boundaries. Unfortunately, very little writing is done this way, especially in the realm of academia. Most classes put strict limits on what and how students can write. They grade less for creativity and more for homogeneity. It’s no wonder that within this environment students grow to loathe the whole process. If you didn’t have this kind of experience throughout your school days, yet you still love writing, then count yourself among the lucky few. Unfortunately, even if you are one of those students who hate to write, you’ve got very little say in the matter. You had to write throughout high school, and no matter what you’re majoring in, you’ll have to write throughout college. If you hate writing it’ll be very difficult. However, I don’t think it’s something you have to hate. After all, if students can go from loving writing to hating it, why can’t they go back to loving it again?

Imagine how easy a writing class would be if you could be like those kids and “just love to write.” You wouldn’t have to worry about finding time to write an essay since you can always find time for what you love. You wouldn’t have to worry about revising either, as the prospect would be more of a treat than anything else. It would be hard to love to write and not get very good at it while enjoying every step of the way. That’s why I believe that the most important lesson you can learn about writing, in English Writing 112 or any other class, is to love doing it.
It’s not very helpful to say, “Get out there and learn to love writing” though, is it? As I said, I believe it’s a skill. Skills have to be learned through mindful practice under certain circumstances. Luckily for you, English Writing 112 is a pretty good environment for learning this skill—if you go about it the right way. There are four specific things you can do in this class that I believe will help you learn to love writing. The best part is they don’t require a lot of extra time, something I’m sure that’s coming at a premium for you now. Even if they do require some time, I’m willing to bet the time and energy you’ll save by loving to write as opposed to hating it will make the added effort more than worth it.

The first thing you need to do is learn to take advantage of generative writing. If you don’t know what that is yet, you’ll learn about it very soon in class. Simply put, the goal of generative writing is to pick a topic and write about it quickly and without over-thinking it. You might spend five minutes writing about the previous experiences you’ve had with writing or strategies you have for revision. It’s very easy to zone out during these periods, or to answer the question with as few sentences as possible and call it quits. Don’t do it. Always spend the full time writing, even if you think you’ve run out of things to say. The reason for this is very simple: you've got a lot going on in your unconscious mind and this is one of the best ways there is to get it out. I know that it was during these seemingly inconsequential generative writing sessions that I stumbled across some of my best ideas. One night I had spent an hour, with very little success, trying to find a way to put together the pieces of the Unit I essay I had written. The next day in class, during a five minute generative writing exercise, I stumbled across the solution and found, much to my chagrin, it was far superior to the weak attempt I had slaved over the previous night. I would further advise that you do some generative writing on your own. It doesn’t have to be about anything in particular. Just sit down once a night and write for ten minutes. Try to emulate the young students who loved to write, and soon you’ll love to write too.

Second, when you’re writing a first draft, do it quickly and do it dirtily. The kids in the class I observed didn’t spend their time tweaking the sentences they wrote or checking with other students to see if they spelled a word
right. They wrote without revising, and when you’re writing a first draft you should too. I know this may seem like a foolish suggestion. If your high school experience was anything like mine, you probably sat down to write an essay (likely the night before it was due) and a few hours later got up with a complete, ready-to-hand-in piece. I believe this is a terrible practice because it’s woefully inefficient. When your brain has to switch constantly between writing mode and revising mode, the whole process will take much more time and energy. Writing under these conditions just isn’t fun.

What’s more, it can lead to something I call Blank Screen Paralysis. This phenomenon involves sitting in front of your computer and staring at the empty white page while a sense of dread slowly overtakes you. People fear that their first draft has to be, if not perfect, at least good. Nonsense! The point of a first draft is to get your ideas on paper, and let revision do the rest. Trust me, in this class you’ll have to do plenty of revising anyway, so don’t worry about it at the beginning. I know this isn’t an easy thing to do, but it pays off handsomely. I remember once spending more than six hours writing a five page paper. In the end I still had to revise it some more. I would have been far better served if I had just written the first draft in an hour (something you can easily do if you don’t focus on getting it out perfectly), spent an hour doing something else, and gone back to it and spent an hour putting it into a presentable form. If you really feel uncomfortable having people look at your unpolished work, then just spend some of the time you’ll save on writing it revising the piece into a “rough draft 2.0.” It’ll come out looking better, it will take less time, and you’ll have quite a bit more fun writing it. That’s the whole point.

Third, spend time thinking about what you want to write. Unlike in middle and high school where the subject of your writing was often chosen for you, in English Writing 112 you will get to pick what you want to write about. I think this is a wonderful thing. Freedom is part of what made the young kids I saw love writing. Now for what is probably one of the first times in a long while you have that freedom too. However, with freedom comes responsibility. Even though the class often provides several days to choose a subject, I can’t tell you how often I saw someone pick a topic in the first ten minutes. It’s far better to find and choose a subject that interests you right before the decision deadline than to pick the first thing that
comes to your mind. Look at multiple different topics and think about how much you could say about each and how interested you are at examining them more. Give yourself time to mull over the decision. If the deadline's come and gone, and you're supposed to be writing the first draft but you suddenly realize that the topic just isn't for you, ask to see if you can still change it. I changed the topic of my Unit III research paper no less than four times. I started with a paper on college dining and finished with an essay about smart phones. Had I not changed topics, I never could have written the paper as well as I did. It's infinitely easier to love writing when you're writing about something you're interested in rather than something arbitrarily chosen either for or by you.

Finally, use this class to treat writing as an adventure. It's possible to get through all the big assignments in this class by writing simple, straightforward essays, but it wouldn't be very much fun. The young students I saw didn't feel pressured to write the same way every time. Sometimes they'd write in complete sentences with a coherent narrative, and sometimes they'd just write nonsense. You have a lot of freedom in this class. Try and use it for more than just subject matter. Many of the best and most memorable essays I've read this year could hardly be called essays at all. Out of all of the essays in Other Words, my class almost unanimously chose “The Vocabulary of Comics” as our favorite essay, despite the fact that it was literally a comic. I've read essays that took the forms of To-Do lists, three act plays, and a single run on sentence. Probably the best piece I wrote all year was my Unit III research paper, which took the form of a dialogue between an old English king and a reformist monk. Even more than just format, push to expand every aspect of your writing. If you were never great shakes at revising, try to help revise any paper you can get your hands on. If you generally write papers just long enough to fulfill the length requirement, try to exceed the maximum. Write with a sense of adventure, and you'll have more fun than you thought was possible.

As I'm sure you can tell, I'm not a perfect writer. Moreover, I wasn't even a perfect student in English Writing 112. However, I've learned to enjoy writing again, and that transformed the class from a chore to a blast. Take advantage of the class. Do the generative writings and learn how fun it is to probe around the depths of your subconscious. Don't worry about
first drafts being perfect, but rather experience just how much easier writing is with the heavy burden of perfectionism removed. Take time to choose your topics and revel (responsibly) in the freedom you have with your writing. Treat writing as an adventure and you'll learn to love it again. After all, this is a required class. You might as well enjoy it.
Dear John,

After composing four distinguished pieces of literature, I now feel both compelled and obliged to write to you. In this “time machine” letter, I will inform you of all the necessary tools you need to collect throughout this course to become the successful writer you have always dreamed of being. It is unquestionably a life skill to be able to express yourself in a literate and formal manner, while simultaneously connecting to the reader by maintaining an original and free-flowing style. The guidebook I have posted below will undoubtedly steer you in the right direction, and I hope, grant you the wishes that you have been asking for . . .

Guidebook to a Literate Lifestyle: By John Marino

Chapter I: your first task

“This above all; to thine own self be true.”
-William Shakespeare

Connecting with the self, in any aspect of life, should be the first step in going about a problem or making a decision. So why should it be any different with literature, with writing? When you write, like when you speak, you are expressing yourself. So start at the beginning. Write about yourself. Ask yourself questions and respond to them in texts. Change your
style depending on your mood. Try new things: put on music while writing, write when you’re tired, or when you are really amped up.

Whatever the case may be, you must learn to “try less” in a sense. Let it be natural, let it flow, and write about topics you really like. For me it was difficult at first to relax my mind and thoughts; I was trying too hard. I kept trying to write stylistically, I kept trying to be verbose, and I kept trying to be original. This is a no–go. Improvement, in writing (for me), did not come from continuous effort. By writing about things I liked, I became more interested in expressing myself to people as opposed to wanting to write a killer paper. It’s human nature: people love talking about themselves! So start with saying what you want to say and say it well.

Chapter II: nuts and bolts

“We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.”
-Albert Einstein

Throughout the history of mankind, questions have been posed and responded to in many ways. In essence, what I’m trying to say is, read, read, read! It will indisputably make you a better writer, a better speaker, and it will naturally expand your vocabulary. I signed up for Dictionary.com’s “word of the day” as a personal tool to help me use my writing experience once I was hooked into writing. This isn’t necessary, but things like this can help facilitate the process of learning. A word a day, or a reading of an excerpt a day—just to keep your eyes fresh and your mind sharp. To sacrifice five and ten minutes of your day is a minor consideration in comparison to the benefit you will receive from being literate.

Once you’ve got an arsenal of logistical “nuts and bolts,” you will then be able to take your form of expression to the next level and be an innovator who articulates your opinion on the world around you: Occupy Wall Street; collapsing economies in Europe and the consideration of the reconstruction of the euro; internal disputes in America such as debt, presidential elections, and, of course, the economy.
I’m in no way saying you have to be interested in politics to be a writer. What I am saying is that what our country, and this world, needs, is an innovator. And people who can express themselves, can connect and relate to specified audiences are going to be the ones with the largest impact. When I say largest, I don’t mean “biggest;” I just mean the most substantial.

Personally, I wrote a manifesto on New York City because I’m from New York and I love the city. I also love food, so I connected the two and attempted at grabbing people’s attention. I hope I inspired many to grab their fanny packs and cameras and get on the next plane train or automobile to NYC, or any city, and just explore food.

For me, nutrition is not only a big part of my life, but technically it “is” my life because you are what you eat. So I wrote another piece in which I was even more passionate about nutrition and eating habits. It was a challenge to write because I did not really take a stance; I stated what I do in my daily life. I wanted to create a voice while concurrently sparking thought in the audience.

Overall, the nuts and bolts describe that you should be creative and intuitive with your writing: create a voice. On whatever scale, globally or just in your community, as a writer it is your job to be both informed and to inform.

Chapter III: reception and connection

“Creativity is just connecting things. When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn’t really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That’s because they were able to connect experiences they’ve had and synthesize new things.”

-Steve Jobs

As a well developed writer, after having taken these tools into consideration, you will realize—almost as if it slapped you in the face—that writing is all about perception and a critical lens. Always consider the source.
If you are reading a good piece of writing, you will notice that the writer does not bring any “buffer” words into play. If you went through the essay, you would not be able to take one single word out without changing the meaning of the text or making it incomprehensible. This is the sign of a good, creative writer.

While interpreting the text, note what parts you connect with and what parts you don’t understand. Try to connect and relate them because most likely they’re in the same piece for a reason. Find ways in which you can respond to that text, and, in effect, make your writing say a whole lot in a shorter text. Be concise.

My personal experience with this was when I had to write a response to the ideas in an essay written by author Susan Sontag. An intricate writer, Sontag presented a text in which a stance was barley taken, and it was my task to interpret the text in a unique manner. Although it was an assignment, I went through the text paragraph by paragraph, breaking it down and asking myself each time what each paragraph meant. This is a good exercise to test yourself on whether or not you’re absorbing the text. Looking through my outline, I found a thread of consistency and capitalized on it. It was fairly easy from that point on, and my peer responses in the writing community regarded my essay as an unseen, odd, and unique perspective. It just goes to show what a little critical lens can do. Connect whatever you’re receiving through any of your senses, and then interpret it.

You must know that literature is an art, and like all art forms it can be perceived through any of the senses. Throughout the semester, interpreting video clips and pieces of music helped me understand that connecting my reception through writing about the external source did wonders for my creativity. Taking a piece of art that someone already has interpreted and expressed, and then making it into your own expression—this really helped me learn to piece things together. It’s like a sewing machine: the strands of thread go in, are connected by the needle, and then a beautiful quilt or blanket comes out.

If you follow these steps as I have outlined, and put in a genuine effort, you will become a better writer, reader, public speaker, and in essence you will be more literate. Henry David Thoreau said it best:
GUIDEBOOK TO A LITERATE LIFESTYLE

“Only he is successful in his business who makes that pursuit which affords him the highest pleasure sustain him.”

Try hard in anything that you do.

Dedicated to John,

a true friend.

John,

I hope you enjoyed the guidebook I wrote! I know that you will strive to reach your highest potential, and I know that you will do exceedingly well! How do I know? Well I’m from the future, and you’re doing all right so far. Keep your chin up and attack your fears. See you sooner than you think . . .

Love ya kid, and good luck,

Johnny

P.S. Don’t worry; your teacher is a cool guy!
PART III
JUNIOR YEAR
WRITING
SELECTIONS
Introduction to Junior Year Writing Selections

This final section of the Anthology celebrates six texts from the Junior Year Writing courses. More than 70 Junior Year Writing courses are part of UMass Amherst’s innovative two-part writing requirement. While the essays from Basic and College Writing that precede this section come from first-year courses in general expository writing, junior-year courses are discipline-specific and designed to help students improve the advanced writing skills needed in their chosen field of study. However, despite these different emphases, as we considered the various submissions, it was clear that there is a significant overlap of skills, goals, and genres that transcend this division. Thus, these different emphases of the University Writing Program inform each other and, in many ways, all the texts within this book offer opportunities for learning to writers at all levels. Indeed, when we revised the format of our original anthology, a far shorter text of essays drawn from first-year classes, this was our ultimate goal: to create a book that would become a campus-wide resource and a key part of the University’s effort to both celebrate and improve our students’ writing. It appears from the level of enthusiasm the book has received from first- and junior-year instructors and students, we are well on our way to realizing our vision.

The texts that follow are from Junior Year Writing courses in Anthropology, Art, Comparative Literature, Music, and Sociology. The course name and number and a description of the assignment appear immediately before each text. Because this incarnation of the book is still relatively new, we are all still finding our way. Therefore, while the number of essays we have published may seem small, our ideas about the structure of the book are still evolving. But the genres represented here, as well as their goals and topics, have broad-based
interest. To mention a few: a reflective power essay in the narrative mode on gender identity; a research paper on an electronic choir with over 185 singers from around the world; a review of photographs by a South African artist whose pictures vividly tell the story of apartheid and post-apartheid life in his country. In each assignment, no matter what the discipline, we repeatedly see the instructor’s emphasis on the individual writers’ need to write with deep intellectual engagement in the academic assignment and also draw on their personal contexts to inform their work—yet another commonality between the first- and junior-year programs.

Special thanks go to Laura Holland, Erinn Knis, Betsy Krause, Joya Misra, and Anna Strowe—all of whom went on the hunt, at very busy times in their schedules, to search for papers to submit to us. Their enthusiasm for this project, their willingness to do whatever needed to be done, were constant reminders of how fortunate we all are to be part of an institution filled with people who care deeply about students, their learning, their success, and, in particular—their writing.
ANOTHER KIND OF DIFFERENT

Alexandra Meslin

*Anthropology 364: Problems in Anthropology*

The assignment that Meslin responds to below is called a reflective power essay. This narrative genre asks students to build on their critical thinking and comprehension skills. The additional challenge here is to add self-reflection to the mix in a way that integrates a power analysis yet allows the reader to hear the author’s voice.

Growing up, I was always told that everyone was different, so I never thought that I was a problem until our society imposed its power over me. It wasn't until the end of elementary school that I began to realize that I was another kind of different; not only was I dissimilar, but I was incompatible with most of the rest of the world. I was a freak, an outsider, and a flaw in the system. Our society has a history of creating the illusion of a norm that we are meant to live up to and an archetype for perfection that we should embrace. When it comes to sexuality, there are basic principles that we are meant to adhere to, and anyone who deviates from these standards is placed into the category of an incompatible ‘other.’ As we mature, we internalize these promoted ideals, and then define our identity in relation to those standards. Coming to the realization that you are different at a young age is hard enough, and it is even more difficult when you are told that what you are is not only wrong, but also abnormal and unnatural. Because I didn’t fit into a formulated and structured category, I was made to feel inadequate and flawed. There was a power that expressed that I did not belong, and it haunted me then as it continues to plague me today.

In seventh grade my best friend moved away. She and I had been friends for four years, and we had been nearly inseparable. We spent hours upon hours together playing games, fantasizing about our futures, talking about which boys we liked—living in a world unencumbered by rules or regulations. Having her with me made me feel grounded, alive, and safe. When she left me, I felt an abandonment and a loss that hit me harder than any
pain I had ever felt before. I literally collapsed as if I had been overtaken by a sickness. I couldn’t eat; I couldn’t sleep; I lost interest in everything that had once excited me. It felt as though a part of me had been ripped away, and I was no longer whole. My mother, facing an immense amount of confusion and concern towards my depression, sent me to see a therapist. The thoughts I took away from this experience served to burden me for years afterwards. During my first and only session with her, the therapist asked me a series of puzzling questions: Do you like any of the boys in your class? Do you think that, maybe, you also like any of the girls? Do you realize that girls aren’t supposed to like other girls? Have you noticed that you are different? Essentially, this “therapist” made a thirteen-year-old girl, one that had yet to grasp the nature of sex or sexuality, analyze the nature of her own sexual attraction. I was unable to understand what she meant. Yes, I liked boys and yes, I also liked girls. And it was puzzling for me to consider the fact that this wasn’t the case for everyone. Was I supposed to believe that most people only liked one or the other? How could this be? It made absolutely no sense to me. The therapist told me that I was facing an enormous problem. She pronounced with great authority, “Alexandra, you have an abnormality and are twisted. You have a lot of work to do to figure yourself out.” Looking back, I’m not sure if she meant this as a criticism, but I definitely took it that way. At thirteen years old, I had to face the possibility that I was damaged and deformed in the eyes of the rest of my culture and society. The power inherent in the dominant perspective of what is natural distressed me because I couldn’t live up to it. Compared to this standard, I was flawed, and I felt this inadequacy into the very depths of my soul.

Even as I write these words, nine years after the fact, I feel embarrassed and ashamed by this confession. Why is this? I think it has to do with the power that controls the population in our society. Even though I kept my apparent perversion a secret, the fact that it was considered abnormal was enough to keep me feeling guilty for who I was. My own paranoia that I was defective caused me to self-monitor and regulate my behavior. To this day, only a handful of people know about my difference, and I feel extremely uncomfortable being open about it. In his essay The History of Sexuality (1978), Michel Foucault addresses power in our society and dis-
discusses how the topic of sexuality has been transformed into a calculated convenience for those in control. He speaks of the concept of biopower and how it is a technique of normalization that causes people to consider themselves in comparison to some desired standard, which has been projected as an ideal. Our society has set norms for sexual behavior, especially for children, and any opposition to them is met with harsh critique and claims of a mental sickness. There are social and mental mechanisms of power that cause us to direct the question of what we are to what our sexuality is (1978:38). Power in our society is not simply a hierarchical system, for it exists all around us. Everywhere we go and any cultural institution we are a part of tells us what is normal and what is abnormal, and these suggestions stand to influence how people perceive themselves in comparison to that projection. Therefore, a digression from those standards often causes one to feel that what they are is wrong.

In Debra Curtis’ article “Commodities and Sexual Subjectivities: A Look at Capitalism and its Desires” (2004), she considers the relationship among commodities and sexual practices. She discusses how consumer culture influences the ways in which societies perceive their own sexuality (2004:99). What exists within the mainstream ultimately directs notions of what is natural and what is perverted, thereby determining how people perceive themselves in comparison to the norm. For children in our society, there is absolutely no place for homosexuality, let alone bisexuality. Only male-female relationships are depicted in mainstream books, movies, and advertisements, which leaves no room for consideration that another type of relationship could be possible. The avoidance of the subject causes people to hide from others and repress any feelings that deviate from that projected ideal. In my case, I didn’t learn the term ‘bisexual’ until I was in my third year of high school, leaving four years of my adolescence in a state of perpetual anxiety and fear that I had some kind of disease. The systems of power that stand to control the masses aren’t direct or regulated at all, for fear causes a self-monitoring that is ever present since it is mandated by one’s self.

As Foucault maintained in his essay The History of Sexuality (1974), this kind of power is the most formidable and commanding because it controls people without their having any knowledge of the source of that power. We
live in a self-regulating society of paranoid and delusional people trying to live up to a set standard that does not exist. The projection of what is normal causes all kinds of mental disturbances of low self-esteem that result in depression and anxiety. Thousands of people are left feeling defective and worthless for not being able to reach this ideal. Because this form of power causes a control that is deep within a person’s psyche, it is an unparalleled mechanism of domination. It is a most ingenious tool for maintaining power.

Works Cited


LIFE, DEATH, AND PAINTING

Lauren Middleton

Art 370: Junior Year Writing for Artists

Students were assigned to write an analytical essay in which they were to select and describe an object, and then explore its connections between formal or metaphorical aspects of that object and various aspects of their work as visual artists.

Holding a flat sheaf of birch bark in my hand, I contemplate the tree, shedding its skin in stiff sheets of paper, snow-white mottled with ash gray. I consider the wind ruffling the edges, ash fluttering in the breeze. Edges are chipped away from small animals nibbling, following chance-arranged paths in their pursuit of a deeper nourishment. Time weathers the mottled surface, revealing smooth salmon pink, an inner skin mirroring rounded streaks of darker gray, ruled lines on which a forest's saga is recorded. Fibrous strands peeled and peeled again to reveal a tender blemish, still soft with a lingering moisture.

I have felt an affinity for birch trees ever since I was a young child. I never failed to notice the bark's stark white color against an otherwise brown and green swath of trees. I admired the particularly delicate and slender trunks and branches, stretching and bending this way and that, and the sound their leaves made as they shuddered in the wind. Coming upon a large, freshly shed piece of birch bark, already beginning to nestle quietly into the earth and leaves was, and still is, akin to my finding a piece of priceless treasure.

These swatches of paper never cease to fascinate me. They are simultaneously something born of natural processes, foreign to daily human life: wild. And yet, they feel as familiar as blank sheets of paper, slates empty of human evidence, beckoning me to make my own mark on them, to combine my marks with the spots and flecks of forest history that nature has written there.
Looking closer at these small canvases, I see pinhole punctures bored through compressed layers, serving as apertures for dirt as well as afternoon sunlight. A gaping hole mars the integrity of the surface, punched through by freezing and thawing water infiltrating lesions and cracks. Weathering flakes the paper, making it as dry and thin as an old woman’s hands shedding the memories of a past life. Scratches imprint thin skin, careless branches and animal scufflings lightly carving and documenting.

The tree sheds its old skin in an effort to keep growing. I too must shed my old ways of thinking, of behaving, and of relating to others in order to allow new life in. This regeneration of life is reflected in my visual work using the metaphor of female reproductive cycles. On the surface, my paintings are representations of fetal or uterine forms, an arrangement of organic, curving shapes in varying degrees of ambiguity. The shapes hint at womb-like spaces, and my primarily red color palette alludes to the body’s cycle of building up life-sustaining blood that is then shed when life has failed to grow.

These womb-like environments sometimes appear nourishing and hospitable to life, with petal-like forms blooming into a blood-rich flower, or a fragile embryonic form cradled in the folds of an illuminated inner space. In other works, however, the internal spaces appear hostile, with the paintings depicting thorns barring new life from entering and growing, or perhaps showing the space being entered and subsequently altered by an outside force, whether for good or bad remaining unclear. The colors in these works often turn from bright and healthy blood and life-affirming reds to darker red-blacks and purples, drips and splatters suggesting bleeding, destruction, and loss of the life force. In still other paintings, blue wave-like forms curl around the red, blood-filled organic shapes in an ambiguous dance in which it is unclear if the encroaching water will serve to nourish life or to take it away with its more destructive properties.

Like the birch trees that shed what is no longer useful to them to grow, the births and deaths in my work are also a metaphor of my emotional experiences in life, documenting the process of working through painful and negative emotions, and using wisdom to know when it is time to let go of old habits and beliefs—about myself and others—that no longer serve me in a positive way. Sometimes I participate in this process grace-
fully, instinctively knowing when it is time for one thing to end and another to begin and accepting these realities wholeheartedly. Other times, my mind rejects this process with such ferocity that I am left in wonder at the human tendency to cling to the old and the familiar. The coexistence of nourishing, life-sustaining imagery and more violent, destructive imagery in my work reflects this dichotomy, with my recent paintings depicting barbed stems surrounding, cutting through, or emerging out of blossoming heart-flower forms. Similarly, my mind sometimes creates thickets of sharp thorns around ideas and people, barriers to the cycles of growing and receding, while at other times I am able to conscientiously prune what is in the way and leave what is protective to fragile, new life.

As a child, I was taught never to peel the bark off the birch trees, to only take it when it had already fallen to the ground. You cannot force the growing and shedding process of a living thing: if it is not yet time for something to die, it is not time. This process cannot be rushed in the case of the trees, and I’ve found it also cannot be hurried in my own life. The shedding of the old in the life of the tree, in my own life, and in my work manifests as a violent, uncomfortable experience if it is forced before its proper time. However, if properly nourished and supported, it becomes a powerful act of self-regeneration and healing. Just as I must be patient and wait for the tree to yield its material to me at a time of nature’s choosing, so must I be patient with myself in learning to let go of what must die, and to manifest what should live.

This process of allowing what is working to live and what no longer serves to die is present in all art making, although I have experienced it primarily in painting. Mark making in painting is a constant additive and subtractive process. I add pigment and create forms, only to edit, change, and take away from the surface. I strive to add layer upon layer of paint, all the while altering marks that have already been put down, sanding the surface, and painting again. I am constantly making choices about each shape. Should this mark stay just how it is? Should I modify it somewhat into a new form? Or should I change it entirely, removing the old to make way for new marks bringing their own new life to the work?

The beauty and fascination in painting for me is that regardless of how many times I cover a mark, its color and tone continue to affect the visual
appearance of whatever is layered on top of it, just as the layers of a birch
tree’s bark leave traces of what has been previously shed. And so it is in life:
in the process of learning to nurture what must live and letting go of what
must die, the realization comes that the letting go does not have to be the
violent, unpleasant struggle that it so often becomes when we fear losing
the familiar surfaces. We retain the intangible marks that emotional expe-
riences have left us with, and although they are perhaps faint beneath lay-
ers of skin and paint, this fact means that we never truly have to lose that
which we let go of, for we carry these people, these experiences, and these
marks with us.
SOUTH AFRICA: A VIEW FROM WITHIN

Carl Shulman

Art 370: Junior Year Writing for Artists

Students were assigned to do an art review, interpreting the work of South African documentary photographer David Goldblatt, which was exhibited at the University Museum of Contemporary Art, February 3, 2011-May 1, 2011.

David Goldbatt’s photography exhibition Intersections Intersected is a tribute to the humanity of everyday South Africans during both Apartheid and post-Apartheid eras. Goldbatt captures the benevolence of a people that are both the oppressed and the oppressor. His use of color and black and white photography, both digitally and manually printed, highlights the diversity and change in his fifty years of documentation. The importance of portraying the bland, the banal, the blasé is evident in his use of domestic, disenchanted scenes: a kitchen, a bedroom, and a back yard all find their way into Goldbatt’s exhibition. He takes the humdrum and unimportant and applies meaning through descriptive captions and each piece’s relationship to others in the show—diptychs, triptychs, and single photographs.

South Africa’s political history is overviewed very carefully in a triptych portraying Synodal Hall, home of the Dutch Reformed Church. In the framed photograph, on the left is a picture of the outside of the hall from 1986, when the Apartheid system was created and enacted as a “Christian” response to the cultural differences seen in South Africa during the 1940s. The middle of the black and white set shows a photograph of the inside of the hall, full of white men, taken in 1965—Synod of the Reform Dutch Church. The third photograph is the Demolition of the Dutch Reformed Church into a Hotel. This particular triptych is uncharacteristic of the rest of the exhibition because it personifies the political malice instead of capturing the personal, even intimate reaction to injustices. It does, however, put the years of work into perspective (Pre-Apartheid to Post-Apartheid).
Goldbatt does not refer to himself as an artist: “I am a photographer, not an artist”; he takes bits of what he and his countrymen experience and puts it in contrast with itself. He documents the same location years apart. *The Docrats’ Living Room*, for example, was a picture from the inside of an Indian family’s home. The Docrats were forced to leave and relocate because the Group Areas Act dictated their neighborhood would become a white neighborhood. Their home was needlessly destroyed, other than their bathroom, which was reinforced concrete. *The Docrats’ Lavatory* was taken in 2003, close to thirty years after their home was demolished. Still standing is the reinforced lavatory, like a sign of indomitable, unconquerable humanity. The razing of the Docrats’ residence was pointless; even three decades after it was demolished, it still remains undeveloped. Removing residents under the auspices of building more homes and creating a sustainable society failed in South Africa. Because of societal prejudice, the people who needed the most help were those who suffered the most.

There is an uncanny differentiation of class and race in South Africa that Goldbatt documents throughout his photography. *You be the Driver and I’ll be the Madam* is one of Goldbatt’s most successful pieces. It is hidden, unassumingly, in a small walkway of the exhibition that is filled with a series of photos taken in Soweto, a predominantly black neighborhood in Johannesburg. This series shows the conditions that the Apartheid system had on individuals. As Goldbatt was documenting the area over a six-month period, he came across a man and a woman outside their home and asked if he could take a picture. They agreed and the woman said, “You be the driver and I’ll be the madam.” They could not afford a car so they each picked up a side of a car bumper and held it in front of them while they posed. This interaction underscores the vast difference in wealth between racial groups. They ended up creating a farce from the poor situation they were forced into. Knowingly or not, they were able to comment on the white/black relations of the time—the economic problems, as well as the daily struggle to stay alive. The people who are documented in this photograph were able to pose in a way that brings attention to the majority of the problems facing the people of South Africa: poverty and wealth, racism and egalitarianism, hope and despair.

With the government’s Group Areas Act, large groups of non-whites were forcefully removed from their homes and “given” a different one in a non-
white area. The problem was that these homes were never completed due to corruption, incompetence, lack of funding, or other contrived excuses. Stalled Municipal Housing Scheme is a photograph of only three-quarter finished homes outside of Johannesburg—homes with no roofs, no windows, and no doors. They stand as a reminder of the intended “good will” of the Group Areas Act. The homes are uninhabited, uninhabitable, and unacceptable.

One section of the exhibition has a number of large, color triptychs. They all depict everyday life after Apartheid. Andy Kula Washing His Clothes has three non-linear narrative photographs. The first is a long broad shot of a road with a few houses on the side. The middle is a close up of Andy Kula, washing his clothes in a tub in front of his house with its bright green door. The third and final photograph is where the pieces come together. The viewer is able to see Kula’s home, other buildings in the landscape, and the mountains in the background, referencing the first shot. Also, with a more precise eye, one can see the fence posts are the same as well. This area of the exhibition shows some of the daily happenings in the lives of the struggling people.

Due to Goldbatt’s intimate understanding of South Africa’s troubles, he would not use color photography during the Apartheid era. His use of black and white film captures the depth of depravity and saturation of the system into everyday life. When the post-Apartheid era began, he switched to color film and now even uses digital. He says that he can get the same results with a program like Adobe Photoshop in a shorter time than he got in the darkroom. The photographer also uses a camera that does not have fixed angle lens. This allows him to keep objects in the foreground and objects in the background in the same relative focus. His color human landscapes, as Goldbatt calls them, are vivid and encapsulate the viewer with “sweet” colors and expansive subjects. The color prints are about four feet by four and half feet. Most of the black and white photography is about one third smaller. These formats accentuate the sociopolitical climate at the time the photographs were taken. The smaller prints capitalize on the feeling of other-ing, of being small as compared to “the man,” and generally of suppression. The larger prints act as a breath of fresh air, regardless of their content. They are full of color and hope for a brighter future, not something that is unattainable, but almost tangible.

As I progress through the exhibition, I am struck with the scale of the work, not only the size, but the volume as well. It is like seeing into his soul
and the soul of his country. There is conflict in the pictures, unresolved human emotions, that manifests itself in the candid expressions, the unfinished building projects, the depth of black and white prints, and the focus of the color prints. David Goldbatt seizes the viewer’s heart and does not let go. There are moments of joy, sadness, triumph, failure, ecstasy, and pain. Progressing through the exhibition is progressing through the cultural history of the ordinary South African. The only way to attain this visceral response is to encounter the exhibition.

February 3, 2011-May 1, 2011.
University Museum of Contemporary Art
THEY’RE MADE OUT OF MEAT: THE AMERICAN LITERARY RELATIONSHIP TO WHAT WE EAT

Nellie Condee

CompLit 397B: Junior Year Writing

Students were assigned to write a 9-10 page paper on some topic within Comparative Literature that they felt passionate about. The paper was to be presented at their final student/teacher conference. Students could choose the texts, the topics, and the approaches. They were also required to do an annotated bibliography.

The American history of meat has been a strange one. Though we consume livestock by the drove, the typical United States citizen is oblivious to the origins of their meat and the processing necessary to get it to them. Our steak is a slab birthed and swaddled in plastic, and it will die as a slab drowning in sauce. This is a theme visible, and sometimes mocked, in literature as well. A 1990 short story written by Terry Bisson entitled “They’re Made out of Meat” follows two aliens, shocked and disgusted to discover that humans should be made out of as typically an unthinking and dead material such as meat. The story is meant to be slightly humorous, but the reality of meat production is often less so. Meat consumption and production has an immense effect on the individual, an effect which can even be seen through modern literature and the media, namely, through Ruth L. Ozeki’s novel, My Year of Meats, and through current advertisements for fast food chains.

To understand the modern American’s relationship to meat in literature, one must first consider historical context. Factory farming existed in the United States prior to World War II, but it tended to be rare. Meat was still expensive for the average American, the cost-cutting methods of factory farming having yet to take hold. Upton Sinclair’s 1906 novel, The Jungle,
depicted a family of Lithuanian immigrants living in the meatpacking district of Chicago and working at one of the factory slaughterhouses there. The concerns the novel raised had potential to stop a problem before it began, but upon the passing of the Meat Inspection Act and the Pure Food and Drug Act, the American demand for meat increased.

Meat remained expensive up through the beginning of World War II. Red meat was a commodity that only the wealthy could afford in any large quantity. Zora Neale Hurston recounts her Florida childhood in Megan J. Elias’ book, *Food in the United States, 1890-1945*, and states that “We had chicken on the table often . . . There was plenty of fish in the lakes around town . . . But beef stew was something rare. We were all very happy whenever Papa went to Orlando and came back with something delicious like stew beef” (13). Recipes from cookbooks of the time reflect meat’s costly nature. Chicken was the most prevalent pre-World War II meat, with everything from the still fairly standard Chicken Casserole to the now quite strange Chicken Gelatin offered (*Good Housekeeping’s Book of Menus* 150-151). Red meat, when included, took the form of cheaper cuts, either ground or chipped beef left over from a Sunday roast, or parts of the animal that many might consider “less desirable.” Recipes including beef kidneys, livers, and brains could be found in cookbooks from this time.

The Second World War brought strict rationing of many American commodities, including meat. Upon the war’s finish, American desire for meat saw a sudden surge. In his book, *Fast Food Nation*, Eric Schlosser points out the typical 1950s American’s obsession with convenience. As a result, factory farming, taking cues from auto-assembly lines, gained popularity among corporations like never before. Food was reincarnated as a product of new industry processing, made possible with wartime technology. Dinner could now be poured out of a can, or arrived frozen and was simply re-heated. Between 1950 and 1965, American agricultural production more than doubled in an attempt to meet this new demand for cheap food (Foer 162). The demand for cheap meat was obliged by factory farming. Farming became more about profit, rather than quality. This was also the dawn of the fast food age. McDonalds opened, and sold hamburgers for fifteen cents, enabling even the poorest family to go out and enjoy a cooked meal at a restaurant, an impossible scenario before factory-farmed meat.
In his book, *Eating Animals*, Jonathan Safran Foer points out that meat has only gotten comparatively cheaper since then. In the past fifty years, the price of housing has increased nearly 1,500 percent and new cars more than 1,400 percent. The price of milk, however, is up only 350 percent. The price of eggs and chicken meat has yet to double. In fact, Foer states that “taking inflation into account, animal protein costs less today than at any time in history” (109). Americans today love their meat, and they love it cheap. The influx of cheap labor from Mexico and other nations and a factory monopoly on animal agriculture allow for this.

It is this modern setting into which Ruth L. Ozeki’s novel, *My Year of Meats*, enters. The characters in the novel initially set out to paint meat in a positive light. The plot of the book circles around the production of a beef-corporation-sponsored Japanese television series called *My American Wife!* The corporation, American company BEEF-EX, wishes to exploit the relationship between American love of meat and the success of the nuclear-age family model in order to boost their sales overseas. The protagonist of the book is a half-Japanese, half-American woman, Jane, who works as the director for *My American Wife!* While she is initially agreeable to the show, the agenda of BEEF-EX soon begins to wear on her. Jane’s initial contact with BEEF-EX is through a memo outlining concepts which the corporation finds both desirable and undesirable for its show. Listed among the “Desirable Things” are attractive families with obedient children and docile husbands, exciting hobbies, and a delicious meat recipe to be featured in each episode. “Undesirable Things” include obesity, squalor, and, to Jane’s shock, what BEEF-EX refers to as “second-class peoples” (12). We are also supplied with a motto that is both helpful and easy to remember: “Pork is Possible, but Beef is Best” (12). All families chosen by BEEF-EX, such as Suzie Flowers and her “down-home country” husband, exemplify the nuclear age American family blended perfectly with BEEF-EX ideology.

Throughout the novel, many families are featured on *My American Wife!* However, the last family proves to be the BEEF-EX favorite. Bunny Dunn and her significantly older husband, John, are selected because their family essentially live meat. The Dunns own a feedlot and a slaughterhouse, and though BEEF-EX enjoys the opportunity to portray a beef
family in a wholesome light, it is John who truly interests them. John was seventy-two when he fathered Bunny’s young daughter. BEEF-EX is quick to focus on the fact that John attributes this accomplishment to the fact that he has eaten red meat every single day of his life.

However, despite the best attempts of BEEF-EX, the discrepancy between the average American’s relationship with meat and the reality of meat processing becomes painfully apparent. Bunny and John’s daughter, Rose, is beginning to show signs of early adolescence, a condition known as “precocious puberty.” Rose, at a mere five years old, has breasts and pubic hair. Upon investigation of the practices at the Dunn feedlot, Jane discovers the use of illegal and carcinogenic growth hormones on the Dunn cattle. Artificial hormones are an unfortunate reality in the meat industry. Feedlots require money to keep animals alive. Animals are therefore engineered, either through selective breeding, or through application of hormones, to reach market size faster. Previously, it may have taken as long as three or four years for cattle to reach “market size.” Now, however, the typical cow is slaughtered at twelve to sixteen months. The faster and bigger an animal can be grown, the more money a company can ultimately make. The particular growth hormone discussed in My Year of Meats is diethylstilbestrol, or DES. DES was a hormone used commonly during the 1960s in the poultry and beef industries, and later prescribed to pregnant women to assist fetus growth. In the following years, it was discovered that DES did nothing to assist pregnancy; women who were prescribed the hormone, in fact, had increased chances of developing breast cancer over the age of forty. Children of DES users were more likely to suffer birth defects, including uterine deformities in girls, and they also suffered a higher risk of more rare forms of cancer as they aged. The use of certain hormones in meat production has been linked to sterility in both genders, a fact which is humorous, given the meat industry’s long history of linking meat consumption with virility and manliness.

This link is one still nurtured and maintained in advertisements for meat-centric products and corporations. Burger King, in their 2006 commercial for the Texas Double Whopper, features a man sitting in a restaurant, eating a laughably small meal. The man scoffs at the meal, condemning it as “chick food,” and launches into a song about being manly and
hungry. He is quickly joined by other men, equally manly and hungry, and they all head off to Burger King for a Texas Double Whopper. The commercial denounces tofu, and the men “admit” that they have eaten quiche, as if consuming any food that is not meat is something of which to be ashamed. The men flock in growing numbers towards each other and their beef, confident in their masculinity, and triumphant to have overcome the tyranny of the vegetable. They ultimately hurl a car over a bridge into a dump truck, where it is towed along by another man being led by another Whopper.

Commercials for the KFC Double Down, a sandwich introduced this year, using two chicken breasts in place of buns, uses similar tactics. Again, men are shown triumphant, announcing that “today is the day,” stating things that they will accomplish today. A young man at a skate park states that today is the day that “I will ignore the voice of reason.” A slightly chubby man standing in an elevator with an attractive blonde announces that he will talk to the girl from accounting today (blonde flashes a small, but decidedly flirty, smile). The men, voices building, will “ditch the bun” today, and demand “two meaty filets, two slices of cheese, and two slices of bacon.” The chubby man from earlier, eyes dancing with the fire of possibility, repeats “Yeah, I said bacon.” The men stride off to accomplish all they can accomplish today, emboldened by the promise of meat later on in the day.

Men are the target audience in these commercials. Women, when shown, are either the oppressors keeping men from their meat, or sexual objects that men can conquer once they have acquired their meat. In both cases, meat is pivotal. Nothing may be accomplished without the assistance of meat, but once it is, the world has endless possibilities. The message is clear to all who watch: to eat meat is to be all that may become a man.

These men, however, should be careful when consuming their vast quantities of meat. Sicknesses caused by food-borne pathogens are on the rise. More people are sickened today by bad food than a generation ago. Salmonella and E. Coli poisoning, as well as Listeriosis, are among the three most common illnesses. Equally distressing is a study released by the USDA in 1996 which found that 78.6 percent of ground beef that the department sampled contained microbes spread mostly through fecal matter. This paints
a clear picture as to why Americans are getting sick with these diseases in increasing numbers; to quote Eric Schlosser in his own blunt manner, “there is shit in the meat” (Schlosser 197). However, despite the ready availability of information regarding health concerns and meat, animal protein consumption in the United States still continues to grow.

Factory workers, too, are horrifically affected by the work that they do. The speed of factory lines has increased exponentially over the past several years; slaughterhouse workers are now expected to kill and process as many as 2,050 head of cattle a shift. This increased speed also leads to an increased job injury rate, something which we see, again, in My Year of Meats. Jane, upon entering the Dunn slaughterhouse, refers to it as “walking through an invisible wall into hell” (281). She describes the quick pace with which the processing lines run. “Chains, pulleys, iron hooks, whipped around us with increased speed” (281). However, it’s not merely the chains which move so quickly. Jane notices that “overhead a continuous rail system laced the ceiling, from which swung mammoth sides of beef, dripping, and heavy with speed as they rattled toward us” (281). This is a dangerous environment for anyone, and indeed, Jane finds herself seriously injured when she stumbles into the path of one of these swinging carcasses.

In the real world, workers are often encouraged to work through their injuries. Injury reports, when filed, are riddled with discrepancies. One official report submitted to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration by a Nebraska IBP beef plant showed a difference of more than 1,500 filed injury logs when compared with a separate report discovered on file secretly at the same plant (Schlosser 180). It is feasible, however, that corporate slaughterhouses might claim this as necessary. To keep in step with American demand for meat, slaughterhouses must work quickly, and they must keep true injury rates under wraps if they want meat to be continually viewed as a wholesome staple of the American dinner table.

Though the physical tolls of factory farming are daunting enough, there are psychological ones to consider as well. Temple Grandin, a noted animal scientist and advocate for animal welfare, has commented that the dehumanizing work of constant animal slaughter can make even the most mentally sound person develop sadistic tendencies. Official industry protocol dictates that animals be rendered unconscious with a type of stun gun
before being processed, but in a video taken by workers at one plant and submitted to the *Washington Post*, animals are shown either improperly stunned, or not stunned at all, but in either case conscious and sent down the processing line. According to the *Post*, “more than twenty workers signed affidavits alleging that the violations shown on the tape are commonplace and that the supervisors are aware of them…thousands and thousands of cows go through the slaughter process alive…the cows can get seven minutes down the line and still be alive” (Foer 231). The people carrying out these acts of stupendous animal cruelty were, by all accounts, completely normal and mentally healthy individuals prior to beginning their work as factory farmers. While living beings should not, under any circumstances, have to suffer through their own inhumanely prolonged demise, and it is horrifying to read these accounts, it is important to remember that many of these workers, as sadistic as they may have become, are merely a symptom of a larger, much more encompassing issue.

During my research for this presentation, there was one recurring theme that struck me in many of the narratives I read. Jonathan Safran Foer, Michael Pollan, and Ruth L. Ozeki all refer to the act of eating meat as requiring a massive “act of forgetting” on the consumer’s part. It would not be difficult for the average American to learn all they needed to know, and more, about where their meat comes from, and what goes into getting the animal from pasture to plate. The information is there, and it is easy to obtain. At this point, American ignorance has become willful, and even detrimental to our health. Meat is touted in the media as the key to virility, while at the same time, the effects that certain growth hormones will have on the human reproductive system is unknown. Books present meat as a wholesome staple of the American meal while ignoring the possibility that a Mexican immigrant may very well have lost his hand processing that steak. The aliens of Terry Bisson’s previously mentioned short story argue that humans, being composed of mere flesh cannot possibly be capable of intelligent thought and action. While these aliens are incorrect in that regard, humans are very capable of intelligent thought, our actions regarding animal welfare and meat consumption render us not much better than the meat upon which they look down, and that we so willfully disembowel.
Annotated Bibliography


Adbrands.net features company profiles for many large corporations and their major advertising campaigns. Two advertisements featured on this Web site were analyzed for their portrayal of meat, and how they used preconceived notions of food and gender roles to make the American public want to purchase their product.


This is a short story in which two aliens come to Earth and discuss their surprise at the fact that the leading intelligent life force on the planet is comprised entirely of flesh. This story is used as an introduction to how meat can generally be conceived of by the population at large: namely, that of a dead piece of flesh, devoid of any thought or past life.


This book concerns itself with what Americans were eating in the first half of the twentieth century, how they were preparing it, and the thinking behind why they were eating it. It provides historical context for my analysis of meat-centric literature and media.


Foer’s book offers insight into the environmental, human, and animal rights issues surrounding the meat processing industry, and explores stories we tell to justify our eating habits as Americans. It offers insight into Americans’ relationship with food, and touches on how literature at large relates to it.


This is a recipe book published by the Good Housekeeping Magazine in 1922. It shows what Americans were eating prior to World War II, and provides information against which American eating habits post World War II can be compared.


Pollan’s book concerns itself with the issues Americans face when choosing their diet, and how our food choices now will affect our society in years to come. When looking at food in a primarily historical context, and how it relates to literature and the media, it will prove useful to also look at the future of food, and how that could relate to literature to come.

Not only does this site offer information on the types of foods Americans chose to eat at home over the course of the twentieth century, but it also talks about what Americans ate while they were out, and the menus they would offer when having company for the evening. This Web site offers yet more historical context for literary analysis.


Schlosser’s book explores, as he puts it, “The dark side of the all-American meal.” It explores, among other things, the modern meat-packing industry and labor worries among fast-food workers. However, it also goes into great depth, exploring the historical context behind the rise of the fast food industry and American’s love for it.


Sinclair’s book is a work of fiction that deals almost exclusively with food, or rather, food production, and how it affects the people who work in meat-processing factories. It will provide part of one side of the coin when it comes to the American literary relationship with food. It shows the darker side of food production: the details of what goes into getting the average American their meat in the pre-World War I United States.
The young man walks on stage and sits down. The audience leans forward in anticipation. After a moment, he conjures up a lost loved one—a woman who was supposedly murdered by a rich and powerful man. Because of the controversy regarding the woman's death, the young magician was advised against conjuring her on stage. The police step forward to arrest him. There was a small problem, however; this man was an illusion, and faded away on sight!

This scene demonstrates the fragility between reality and the imaginary, or virtual, realm. When listening to Eric Whitacre's *Lux Aurumque* video on his Web site, it may surprise you to know that the choir is virtual; the singers do not rehearse together or meet in one location to put on a concert. In fact, the chorus members only hear themselves and a pianist who accompanies them with the supplemental notes as they perform the song. But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me now introduce you to the creator and mastermind—conductor and composer Eric Whitacre.

Grammy award nominee and nationally-recognized composer, Whitacre did not receive any formal training before the age of 18. Eric Whitacre first developed a passion for music at the University of Nevada,
where he sang in the college choir and wrote his first composition entitled *Go, Lovely Rose*. Earning his master’s degree in composition at Julliard, Whitacre has risen to become one of the greatest modern choral composers of the 21st century. *The Daily Telegraph*, London, declares, “Whitacre is that rare thing, a modern composer who is both popular and original.” And original is a suitable adjective; he is the first composer to use modern technology to create a chorus of voices from all over the world.

Recently, Whitacre appeared on the BBC breakfast morning show, where he shared the story of how the virtual choir began. “Initially, someone sent me a video of this young girl singing all by herself, just singing one of my pieces—the soprano part—and I got this idea that if I could put them all together, get a lot of people to do this, I could cut them all together and make this choir.” With this in mind, Whitacre began accepting video submissions of his composition *Sleep*, asking all vocalists to use the same mp3 file when recording their vocal part. The videos were then synchronized and compiled together to make the first virtual choir. But if the foundation for synchronizing vocalists is dependent upon a live choral track, can it really be called a virtual choir? Such a conundrum was remedied during his next project, *Lux Aurumque*. Here, Whitacre refines the virtual choir process, and the finished product can be found on Whitacre’s Web site, as well as a detailed account on his thoughts for *Lux Aurumque*.

“My goal with this ‘chapter’ of the Virtual Choir was to see if we could not just sing our parts separately and cut them together; I wanted to see if we could actually make music. There is a lot of rubato in my conducting (slowing down, speeding up) and some very specific dynamic gestures, and the singers responded beautifully.”

To aid with the synchronization process, singers were asked to look at a video which gave some last-minute information about musical nuances in the piece, as well as a video where Whitacre is conducting the piece along

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2 Ibid.
3 Whitacre, Interview with Bill Turnbull and Sian Williams, BBC Breakfast, BBC Newsroom, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZuEnle4O04](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZuEnle4O04) (Sept. 22, 2010).
with piano accompaniment for the vocal parts. In total, 185 singers participated from 12 different countries, including soprano soloist Melody Meyers, who recorded a separate video of the soprano solo in the music. Since the production of *Lux Aurumque*, Whitacre has set his sights even higher. His new goal: to create the world’s largest online choir (the current record is 900 singers).

As soon as I found out about this new opportunity, I immediately desired to participate and experience what it is like to be a member of a virtual choir. The process itself is relatively easy—download your vocal part, create a video of your performance while watching the conducting video, and upload it to YouTube under a specific title—but the experience was rather lonesome. In a live chorus, singers are constantly adjusting their performance by unifying vowels, coordinating cut-offs, and matching dynamics, among other things. Similarly, the vocalists are responding to the cues of the conductor, and vice-versa regarding the conductor responding to the sounds created by the choir. But because you are recording a solo track for the virtual choir, you cannot experience these social interactions.

On the plus side, however, there are several positive aspects regarding the virtual choir. On a forum discussion of the virtual choir, a choir director shares his point of view: “This is doing something that couldn’t be done before because lots of the singers are singing multiple parts simultaneously in this choir. Some of the ladies are doing all 3 soprano parts AND the alto parts—just one person. Try doing that live.” In addition, the process of uploading a video to YouTube ensures that people from all over the world can participate because you do not need to gather in one location to put on a performance. Given that there are both positive and negative aspects of the virtual choir, the question then becomes a matter of whether the positive aspects of having a virtual choir negate the negative ones. Benjiman Durfee, a colleague of mine who participated in the *Lux Aurumque* video, gives his personal opinion on the matter:

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I think that [the positive aspects] definitely negate the negative ones … even though it’s not an actual choral experience, it’s just something totally different. I feel like being part of the virtual choir is more of a spectacle experience. Even though you aren’t technically making music with them (by unifying vowels and what not), you are connecting with them through a virtual world that you can’t get in any other setting.”

I think that he has an excellent point. There has been some speculation on whether the virtual choir will replace the live choir, but the virtual choir and a live choir are completely different concepts, and should be viewed as such. Eric Whitacre shares his original intentions on creating the virtual choir:

“In no way am I trying to replace a real, living, breathing choir in a room. Something happened that I wasn’t expecting after the little experiment. We saw the video, and it has a life unto itself, sort of a heightened world. And in a way, what it illuminated from me was this idea that human beings will go to any means possible to connect with other people around the world.”

In essence, the social aspect of the virtual choir is the finished product—when you finally see how others were participating in the same activity, and how you played a part in making it all happen.

Today, we live in a virtual realm. Movies in 3D are becoming more popular; video games like Wii now connect the actions in the game to those performed by the players; and skyping now allows us to communicate face-to-face with friends and loved ones. Perhaps the most astounding demonstration of the virtual influence on today’s society can be found in Japan, where Cryton Future Media has created the first live, animated performer!

6 Benjiman Durfee, Personal interview with the author, Dec. 9, 2010.
7 Whitacre, Interview with Bill Turnbull and Sian Williams.
It stems from the imaginary concept of a “hologram,” and uses a projector to create the moving animated character Hatsune Miku for people to see at concerts. It is among these inventions to which the virtual choir should be compared. One would never compare playing tennis on Wii with playing tennis on an actual court with a live partner. Similarly, the virtual choir has developed an independence from the live choir that virtual users can embrace and appreciate.
AN UNOBSERVED COMBINATION: GENDER ROLES IN SHOPPING FOR SPORTING GOODS

Jennifer Curtin

Sociology 383/396B: Gender & Society

The following introduction and literature review was prepared as part of an original investigation about the existence of gendered spaces and products in a typical sporting goods store. This published excerpt is from the completed study that also includes a full discussion of methods and findings that use this previous research to reinforce specific discoveries in this store. The full study is available from the author.

For the greater part of our nation’s history, sports have been an entirely male dominated arena. However, in postmodern America, women have created a large and influential presence in the sports world, generating a conflict to sustain one’s femininity in a masculine dominated area. In a society where gender can be seen in all aspects of our surroundings, the products and images we are subjected to in stores greatly exhibit gendered ideologies. In the store Dick’s Sporting Goods, the masculine world of sports comes together with the feminine world of shopping, merging these two opposite arenas into one. While sports itself is a gendered arena, the marketing and consumption of these goods reveals a gendered world of its own. This research contributes to the covert displays of gender in all aspects of our society, even in the stores where we shop. From an analysis of the products, images, and employees in this store, it is seen how Dick’s Sporting Goods uses gendered, racial, and class marketing strategies to target intended consumers.
Literature Review

The notion of what it means to “do gender” is often not explicitly discussed in our society, even though it is essential to our identity. According to West & Zimmerman (1987:127), “gender is the activity of managing situated conduct in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category.” In other words, gender is an act or role one must play that is in accordance with their biological sex. Unlike sex, which is innate, gender is a fully conscious performance that reveals one’s femininity or masculinity through its expressions in social situations. As West & Zimmerman (1987:142) state, gender differences “are rendered normal, natural features of persons and provide the tacit rationale for differing fates of women and men within the social order.” What West & Zimmerman suggest is that gender, and the differences in gender, are deemed natural and necessary in order to rank men and women within society. Gender is unavoidable, and it influences all aspects of society, including consumption.

Today, consumption patterns are much different from those seen in the past, where the public domain was meant for men while the private was meant for women. According to Firat (1994: 216), in the postmodern era, “consumption has become an acceptable activity, even for males, who have been relatively freed from having to represent only the masculine.” Gender has become such a large part of our society, even though it is so covert as to be hidden in marketing strategies and the consumption behaviors of consumers. According to a study done by Schertzer et al. (2008:312), marketing strategies assume that “males and females are significantly different from birth and the differences in their preferences and communication styles can be largely, or even entirely, explained by biological factors.” This assumption, that males and females have biologically different preferences and consumption patterns, is a large factor in marketing, as consumption has become a part of one’s identity (Deutsch & Theodorou 2010; Firat 1994; Schertzer et al. 2008). According to Belk, Elliott & Wattanasuwan, and O’Donohoe cited in Deutsch & Theodorou (2010:230):
Consumer culture, and its dual activities of consumption and advertising, become tools for individual identity building as well as social identification; we place ourselves within social groups, our social groups within society, and evaluate others’ social positioning, and thereby identities, through consumption and response to marketing.

Marketing now caters to one’s gender as a part of his or her identity, and uses this notion to sell products to consumers who are now, more than ever, purchasing a part of themselves with the product. For females, “consumption is linked to specific gender performances based on the maintenance of an attractive appearance as dictated by social perceptions of femininity” (Deutsch & Theodorou 2010: 249). Consumption is linked to what it means to be masculine and feminine, and it is used to reveal the social expectations of each gender within society.

It is not simply the products that are marketed towards gender; employees within the store where these products are sold are also used to sell a certain image. Most of the workers seen in customer-service industries, such as retail, are female due to the emotion involved in the social interactions between worker and costumer (Pettinger 2005). According to a study done by Pettinger (2005:468), “bodies and clothes form a ‘network of signs’ to communicate meanings to shop customers and labour is aestheticized [sic].” What Pettinger suggests is that not only do the products convey gendered marketing strategies, but the clothing and bodies of the employees are used to sell these products and ideas to customers.

What is important in understanding the gendering of market strategies are the types of products that are being sold in specific stores, and how the meaning and use of these products is gendered. For Dick’s Sporting Goods, sport and exercise apparel as well as equipment are sold to both men and women. Sports have always been gendered, and until the enactment of title IX almost forty years ago, women’s and men’s sports were unequal based on gender. According to Adams & Bettis, Messner, and Montez de Oca cited in Messner (2011:156), “football, a game that valorizes violent collisions of armored male bodies and heroic metaphors of war and conquest” is linked with “the cheerleader as a symbolic icon of American white femininity.” There is a notion that men play the aggressive sports while...
women play the nonviolent sports, such as cheerleading. When women do participate in sports, gender boundaries are affirmed rather than challenged because “an individual girl who joins the boys’ game gets defined as ‘a token, a kind of fictive boy’” (Thorne as cited in Messner & Suzel Bozada-Deas 2009: 339). As Thorne suggests, women are not readily accepted into sports, and when they are, this does not challenge gender roles but simply reinforces them as women are seen as “tokens,” not as equal teammates.

In some sporting areas, females have emerged as legitimate athletes, but their femininity undergoes a conflict between the gender expectations of being feminine and the aggressive, masculine nature of sports. Wheaton (2010:1067) states that “female skaters have established a subculture that has the potential to challenge dominant attitudes to gender, space, risk and embodiment.” While certain areas of sport are allowing women to challenge these attitudes, they come in conflict with maintaining the attractiveness that is expected from their gender role. Female surfers, while wanting to be accepted as athletes, have to construct their identities in a sport where their almost naked bodies are constantly on display (Wheaton 2010). So there exists a conflict for women who enter sports: how to maintain their femininity in a masculine-dominated arena.

The consumption of sports and sporting goods has become more egalitarian as the years go by, but there still exists a strong male presence underlying this field. When shopping and sports are combined in such a way as in Dick’s Sporting Goods, the gender ideals of masculinity and femininity are combined in one place. According to Fischer & Gainer (1994: 101), “in the shopping domain, men are ‘feminized’ by participation, just as in the sporting domain, women are ‘masculinized’ by participation.” Combining sports and shopping also combines gender roles, and the store itself must target both male and female consumers through the use of gender in interesting ways.

References
AN UNOBSERVED COMBINATION: GENDER ROLES IN SHOPPING FOR SPORTING GOODS


