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Author
Olson, CB

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Fostering Critical Thinking Skills Through Writing

CAROL BOOTH OLSON

The UCI Writing Project transforms abstract concepts about thinking and writing into demonstration lessons teachers can use in classrooms.

My audience consists of classroom teachers. "Picture yourself," I say, "as a college freshman enrolled in History 29C, a survey of 20th century Europe and America. You take your seat in the class, get out your blue book, and try to remain calm as the professor passes out this exam: 'Trace the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States from 1914 to the present. In what ways did economic and political competition affect domestic politics in both countries? Consider wars, the Bolshevik Revolution, socialism, capitalism, economic policies, and imperialism.' "

"After the nervous laughter in the room subsides, I add, "Now, figure that you have three hours in which to take your final, and this is just the first of two essay questions. How would you go about answering this question? What do you have to think about in order to get started?"

The teachers hesitate.

"Well, I'd probably start with 1914 and just write down everything I could remember," says a woman in the front row.

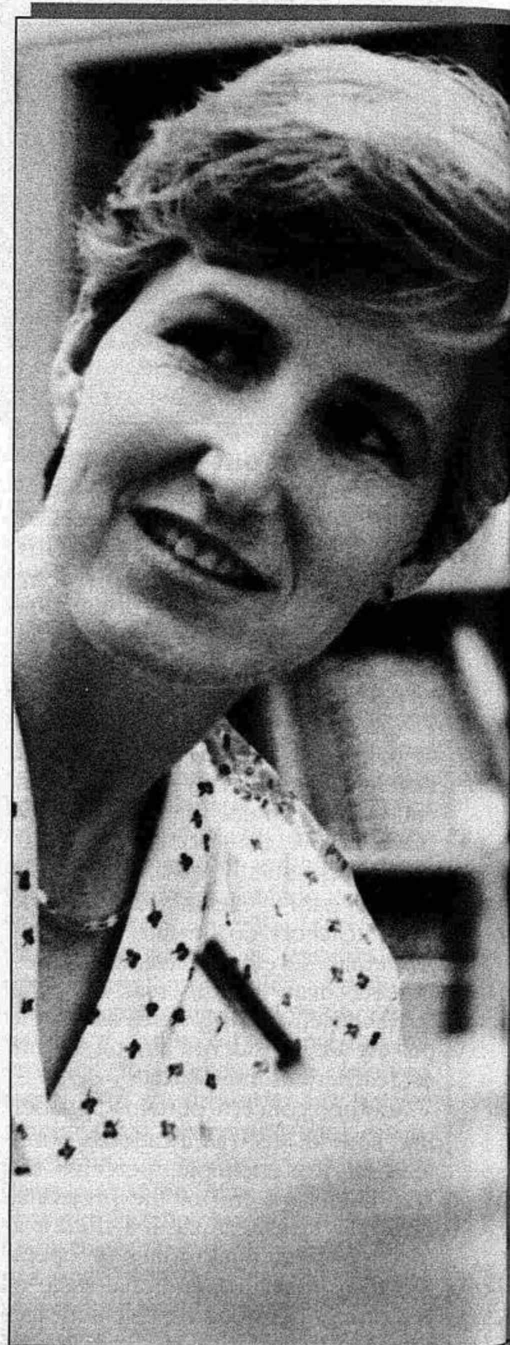
"Kind of in a chronological catalog style?" I ask.

"Yes, like a list."

"I don't think that's the best way to go," another teacher interjects. "You have to be selective on a question like this. I'd replay the professor's lectures back in my mind and recall the key

Carol Booth Olson is Co-Director, University of California, Irvine/California Writing Project.

My thanks to Bill Strong, Professor of Secondary Education/Director, Utah Writing Project, Utah State University, and Owen Thomas, Professor of English, Linguistics, and Teacher Education, University of California, Irvine, for helping me re-see, rethink, and reshape the initial draft of this article.



points he made. Then, I'd make an outline before I actually started to write."

"So, in other words, you'd demonstrate to the professor that you got his or her message by reiterating the main points voiced in class?"

"Yes, but with my own supporting examples."

A man in the back looks perplexed, so I ask him if he'd like to say something.

"I think we're off track here. The question says, 'Trace the relationship between.'"

"And what do those words signify to you? What thinking skill do they ask for?"

"Well, I'd say comparison and contrast."

"So, you think the question requires not merely recall and summary but analysis?" He nods as do a number of other teachers.

I turn to the group: "How many of your students have had practice in interpreting what a question like this is asking for, let alone in the conceptual strategies it would take to answer it?"

The room is silent for a long moment.

"But the question should be stated more clearly," objects an administrator who had intended just to observe. "And it's so broad; I wonder if it's feasible under the time constraints?"

"So do I. And yet, I'll admit to having dropped a few bombs like this on students myself. How many of you have done the same?"

Hands go up all over the room.

This discussion reenacts what takes place in the inservice workshops where I share a model for fostering critical thinking skills through writing designed by 27 Teacher/Consultants from the UCI Writing Project. The Thinking/Writing model integrates ba-

"... the process of writing requires tapping all of the levels of thinking."

sic principles of learning theory, composing process research, and practical strategies of the National Writing Project. The heart of Thinking/Writing is a sequence of demonstration lessons, K-College, that provides students with much needed practice in thinking and writing. The purpose of the lessons, simply stated, is to motivate teachers to think critically about critical thinking and to recognize the potential of using writing as a tool for promoting cognitive growth. Thinking/Writing lessons help teachers re-see, rethink, and redesign their own lessons with a greater awareness of their specific instructional goals.

Why Create a Thinking/ Writing Project

The UCI Writing Project, now in its seventh year as a site of the National Writing Project, first addressed the issue of providing students with ongoing practice in sustained thinking and writing in a two-week curriculum conference in August 1982. Funded by the Office of Academic Affairs at the University of California, Irvine, with supplementary support from the California Writing Project, the conference brought together 27 teacher/consultants, K-College (previously trained in the UCI Writing Project Summer Institute on the Teaching of Composition), to exchange ideas, experience, and expertise. Although we shared a perception that today's students are deficient in their thinking and writing ability when compared with students of a decade ago, we had very little data to verify our collective intuition nor any clear idea of what we might do to remedy the situation.

Two documents were especially significant in determining our focus. The first was *Reading, Thinking and Writing*, a recent report of a national reading and literature assessment of over 100 thousand American school children. This document cited as its "major and overriding finding" that although students at each age level had little difficulty making judgments about what they read, most lacked the problem-solving and critical thinking skills to explain and defend their judgments in writing (Applebee and others, 1981). The results of this assessment do not point to a cognitive inability on the part of students to respond analytically. Rather, because of the current emphasis in testing and instruction on multiple choice and short answer responses, students are simply unused to undertaking critical thinking tasks. A separate research study, *Writing in the Secondary School* (Applebee, Auten, and Lehr, 1981), corroborates these findings. In an intensive one-year observation of two high schools, the researchers reported that 44 percent of the lesson time in six major subject areas involved writing activities of some kind; yet only 3 percent of that time was spent in writing tasks of a paragraph or longer. (The percentage of time in English classes in writing tasks of a paragraph or more in length was higher than other disciplines: 10 percent.)

The second document that helped us establish our objectives was a draft of the *Statement on Competencies in English and Mathematics Expected of Entering Freshmen*, a joint publication of the Academic Senates of the California Community Colleges, the California State University, and the University of California (1982), which was later distributed to every school in the state. This document stressed that before entering college it is crucial that students develop the ability "to understand, organize, synthesize, and communicate information, ideas, and opinions" and be able to demonstrate those thinking skills by "writing compositions, reports, term papers, and essay examinations." When we contrasted the current emphasis on teaching to the proficiency test in the public schools with the expectations of California's college system, we had to ask ourselves: When, where, and how will students get the wide-ranging practice in thinking and writing that will enable them to tap the full range of their cognitive potential? In asking this question, we identified our ultimate concern: What contribution could we make to assist teachers in activating the thinking and writing skills of their students? This was the beginning of the Thinking/Writing Project.

Learning About Learning

Most people take as a given that depth and clarity of thinking enhance the quality of writing. What may not be so readily apparent is that writing is a learning tool for heightening and refining thinking. As writing teachers, we acknowledged that we intuitively foster critical thinking skills through our prewriting, writing, and postwriting activities. But before making our integrated thinking/writing approach a conscious one, we first had to learn more about how people think and learn.

From the learning theorists (Bloom, Bruner, Gallagher, Guilford, Piaget, and Taba), we became reacquainted with the premise that there is a developmental sequence in the growth of thought, that this sequence progresses from the ability to operate at the most concrete to the most abstract levels, and that "the mental structures developed at any preceding stage are ... prerequisite to success in the subsequent one and are incorporated into it" (Taba, 1964, p. 12). Because one of the primary modes of learning is dis-

"By helping students become better thinkers, we would enable them to become better writers and vice versa."

covery, these stages cannot simply be taught like facts from a textbook. Maturity, experience, and practice all play a role in the transition from one level of operation to the next. However, as a facilitator and a guide, the teacher can create an environment that activates discovery and thereby fosters learning. Sequentially ordered activities that gradually increase in complexity can become stepping stones to higher levels of thinking. Taba acknowledged the crucial role of the teacher in this process when she concluded, ". . . how people think may depend largely on the kinds of 'thinking experience' they have had" (1964, p. 25).

Once we had established a theoretical framework from which to talk about thinking, we turned our attention to that most challenging of thinking experiences: writing. As we reviewed the studies of what people do when they compose (Britton, Emig, Flower and Hayes, Perl, Rose, Scardamalia, and others), we gained a greater appreciation of the complexity of the act of transforming thought to print. As Flower and Hayes (1981) pointed out, "Writing is among the most complex of all human mental activities." Essentially, it is a form of problem solving because the writer must "produce an organized set of ideas for a paper by selecting and arranging a manageable number of concepts and relations from a vast body of knowledge" and "fit what they know to the needs of another person, a reader, and to the constraints of formal prose." In short, we learned that researchers are currently looking to the field of cognitive psychology for new insights into the constraints that affect the composing process, such as the knowledge we have to construct and express meaning, the language we have to communicate what we know, the audience and purpose for writing, and the context in which writing occurs (Frederiksen and Dominic, 1981).

Making the Abstract Concrete

At this point, we faced a challenging problem—how to apply what we had learned about thinking and writing by transforming abstract concepts into concrete demonstration lessons that would be meaningful to the classroom teacher. Since Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives seemed to be compatible with the writing process and familiar to most classroom teachers, we decided to use his levels of

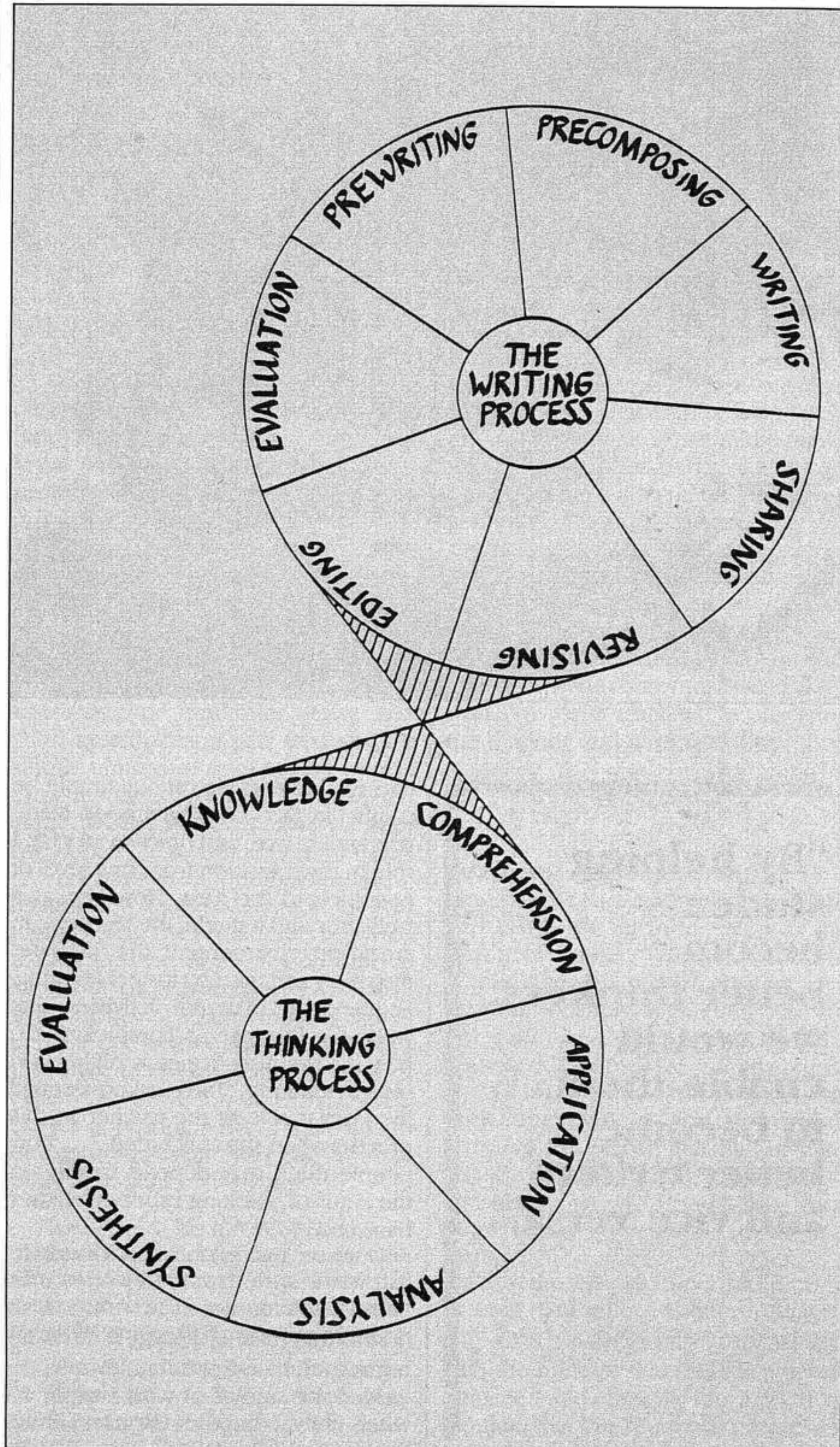
"... writing is a learning tool for heightening and refining thinking."

thinking as a point of departure. On looking closer, we experienced a shock of recognition: all of Bloom's categories in the cognitive domain—knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation—are integral to composing. In other words, the thinking process recapitulates the writing process and vice versa (see Figure 1).

To produce a composition, writers must tap memory to establish what they know, review the information they have generated and translate it into inner speech or print, organize main ideas into a logical sequence, discover specific support for those main ideas, re-see the whole to find a focus, construct a structural framework for communicating an intended message, transform this network of thought into a written paper, and evaluate the product.

Thinking and writing are recursive processes; one often has to go back to go forward. It is difficult, therefore, to describe the act of composing in a linear fashion. One can argue (and we did!) whether evaluation should precede synthesis and whether one has to analyze in order to apply. We also acknowledged that certain stages in the writing process may simultaneously tap two or more thinking levels. The important point, we felt, was that composing involves all of the skills in the taxonomy regardless of the nature of the writing task. To understand this concept, it is helpful to think of two questions that the writer must constantly keep in mind while composing. The first—*What do I want to say?*—is a content-oriented concern that focuses on the written product. The second—How will I get the ideas in my head into written form?—is a procedural concern that relates more to the process of transforming thought into print than to the final product. Whether we ask a student to describe what it's like to peel an orange in rich sensory detail (a comprehension-level task) or to interpret and comment on the significance of the "Turtle Chapter" in *The Grapes of Wrath* (an analysis-level task), the process of writing requires tapping all of the levels of thinking. Given this premise, we concluded that a series of demonstration lessons whose content would gradually increase in complexity and lead students through the levels of thinking would make the *what* in a paper more

Figure 1. The Student's Process.



accessible and would also allow students to focus more attention on the *how* of composing.

In this way, we would reduce the constraints placed on student writers. By helping students become better thinkers, we would enable them to become better writers and vice versa.

The Demonstration Lessons

With a common philosophy about the interdependent nature of thinking and writing behind us and a common goal before us, we launched into the creation of our demonstration lessons. We first turned to Bloom's taxonomy of the cognitive domain as a way of identifying the thinking skills to be fostered in the content of our lessons. Many of us were uncomfortable with the idea of levels of thinking and the implication that these are hierarchical. Nevertheless, we recognized in Bloom's taxonomy a rough progression from *what*, to *how*, to *why*, to *so what* that made sense to us—as did the premise that concrete experiences can become a bridge to more abstract or formal operations. Ultimately, we concluded that all thinking is critical and that the goal of our lessons should not be to reach the top of any hierarchy, but, as Moffet (1981) put it, "to play the whole range."

We also wrestled with our dislike of categorizing as we debated the specific abilities associated with each of Bloom's cognitive levels and began adapting and modifying his terms to reflect more closely the language that teachers use in phrasing writing assignments. Figure 2 is the latest version of what the subcommittee of Writing Project Teacher/Consultants called "the flowering of Bloom."

While our adaptation of Bloom's taxonomy served as a useful tool in examining what it is we ask students to do with a specific writing task, the stage process model of composition—prewriting, precomposing, writing, sharing, revising, editing, and evaluation—provided a way to format activities that would help students move from conception to completion.

1. *Prewriting*. Prewriting activities generate ideas for writing. Taking a wide range of forms—class discussion, brainstorming, visualizing, free writing, and so on—prewriting aims to stimulate the free flow of thought. In our model, prewriting usually precedes the introduction of the writing assignment and may set the stage for thinking and writing about a given topic without specifically addressing it. For example, the following is an application-level question on *The Grapes of Wrath*:

> Steinbeck says, "The people in flight from the terror behind—strange things happen to them, some bitterly cruel and some so beautiful that the faith is refired forever." Please illustrate his statement by giving one example of a cruelty and one example of a kindness that are representative of the events of the novel as a whole.

In order to prepare students to consider the significance of Steinbeck's remark in the context of the larger novel, one might begin by having students free write about what the terms cruelty and kindness mean to them

Figure 2. Taxonomy of Thinking Levels.

Level	Cue Words	
KNOWLEDGE *Recall* Remembering previously learned material	Observe Repeat Label/Name Cluster List Record Match	Memorize Recall Recount Sort Outline/Format Stated Define
COMPREHENSION *Translate* Grasping the meaning of material	Recognize Locate Identify Restate Paraphrase Tell Describe	Report Express Explain Review Cite Document/Support Summarize Precise/Abstract
APPLICATION *Generalize* Using learned material in new and concrete situations	Select Use Manipulate Sequence Organize Imitate Show/Demonstrate Frame How To Apply	Dramatize Illustrate Test Out/Solve Imagine/ Information Known
ANALYSIS *Break Down/Discover* Breaking down material into its component parts so that it may be more easily understood	Examine Classify Distinguish/Differentiate Outline/No Format Given Map Relate To	Characterize Compare/Contrast (Similarities/Differences) Question Research Interpret Debate/Defend Refute Infer Conclude/Draw Conclusions Analyze
SYNTHESIS *Compose* Putting material together to form a new whole	Propose Plan Compose Formulate Design	Construct Emulate Imagine/Speculate Create Invent
EVALUATION *Judge* Judging the value of material for a given purpose	Compare-Pro/Cons Prioritize/Rank Judge Decide Rate Evaluate Criticize Argue	Justify Convince Persuade Assess Value Predict

and then to think about a time when their own faith in humanity was restored when they saw, heard about, or personally benefited from an act of kindness performed by another human being. This latter activity provides practice in the skill of application called for in the assignment.

2. *Precomposing*. Helping students generate ideas for writing is often not enough to enable them to organize and articulate their thoughts. Precomposing activities help students to focus on the specific requirements of the writing assignment as well as to formulate a writing plan.[1] For instance, once students are given the assignment cited above, a teacher might draw Highway 66 on the board and have the class, as a whole, reconstruct the Joads' journey from Oklahoma to California. Students could then select one or more scenes that had a significant impact on them and write a paragraph explaining why the cruelties and kindnesses exemplify Steinbeck's quote. Finally, they could list three other events in the novel that their scene mirrors.

3. *Writing*. Writing is the stage in which thought is transformed into print. But more than that, it is an act of discovery. Often, it is only as we write about what we think (and vice versa) that we grasp what it is that we truly want to communicate. Precomposing activities should be designed to facilitate and not to inhibit the growth of thought that occurs during writing. The goal of the first draft should be fluency and not refinement of ideas or expression.

4. *Sharing*. In order for students to perceive writing as genuine communication and not just a chore to accommodate the teacher, opportunities must be provided for sharing writing, for giving and receiving feedback on work in progress. Sharing enables students to discover how their words affect other readers. Responding assists them in internalizing the criteria for good writing.

5. *Revising*. In a certain sense, revision begins even before a writer puts pen to paper as thoughts are formulated, verbalized internally, and organized. Once the writer has generated a draft and received feedback, the revising stage allows time to reflect upon what has been written—to rethink, resee, and reshape words and ideas. Using the skills gained in sharing and responding, the student must now become his or her own audience and assess the quality of the written work to enhance communication.

6. *Editing*. For many writers, editing is a process that occurs automatically as one composes. For those writers, the editing stage is simply proofreading for minor errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling, and so on. For students who have not acquired the conventions of written English, it requires more conscious attention to correctness.

7. *Evaluation*. Although any act of revision is an act of self-evaluation, the evaluation stage of the composing process involves assessment of the final written product. Whether this rating comes in the form of a letter grade, holistic score, or analytic comment, the criteria on which the paper will ultimately be judged should be clearly delineated and communicated early in the writing process.

Flower and Hayes observed that the stage process model makes composing sound like it can be accomplished in a "tidy sequence of steps," like baking a cake or filling out a tax return, when, in actuality, "a writer caught in the act looks much more like a busy switchboard operator," juggling constraints and working on "cognitive overload" (Flower and Hayes, 1980). While it may not precisely describe the writing process, this model provides us with a teaching process, a tool for talking about thinking and writing that enables students to perceive writing as something that can be crafted and that builds in time for thought and expression to evolve. We wish to provide students with a ladder of activities that leads them to increasingly complex levels of thinking. Our goal is to give students enough guided practice to enable them eventually to internalize a set of conceptual strategies that they can apply to future thinking/writing challenges.

The Process of Thinking and Writing About Thinking and Writing

As Bruce Joyce says, we have to reinvent the wheel every once in a while, not because we need a lot of wheels but because we need a lot of inventors.

As we thought and wrote about thinking and writing, it began to dawn on us that we were concretely experiencing the levels of Bloom's taxonomy. This was a welcome and validating discovery.

The first phase of our endeavor generated what Sheridan Blau, Director of the South Coast Writing Project, would call "creative chaos." Ideas were voiced, pondered, debated, tabled, and reintroduced as we struggled to establish and define what we knew. We soon became aware of our differing learning styles. Some people had to hear an idea over and over again in order to grasp it, while others had to verbalize their thoughts—using the group as a sounding board. During these lofty and often circular discussions, our more visual learners pleaded with us to translate abstract concepts into diagrams on the board; strips of colored butcher paper with lists, charts, and favorite quotations began to adorn the walls of our room. Meanwhile, those of us who explore what we think by writing it down were furiously scribbling in our notebooks.

Through this process, knowledge gradually became comprehension. But we did not fully understand until we began to apply the taxonomy to our writing assignments. Since old lessons would now take on a new thinking/writing focus, it was necessary to analyze them carefully. Many of us were surprised to find great gaps in our writing assignments where students were expected, without direction, to make significant leaps in levels of thinking. No wonder we saw puzzled faces in the classroom when we explained some of these writing tasks. After we broke the lessons down, we reformulated them and put them back together. Writing was our synthesis.

What we developed was a series of five demonstration lessons (one each for K-3, 4–6, 7–8, 9–12, and college) at each thinking level: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Rather than by grade level, the lessons are grouped according to the category of the taxonomy on which they focus because we recognize that within any classroom some students will be ready for stretching experiences while others

need exercises that reinforce previous learning. Moreover, since students bring differing degrees of maturity and experience to any writing assignment, most of these lessons can be repeated (with modifications, if necessary) with younger or older students. We like to think of them as an "accumulating repertory" of ideas, to use James Moffet's term.[2] Each lesson builds upon the one that precedes it. In addition to identifying the thinking and writing skills being fostered and offering specific ideas for each stage of the composing process, we also include extension activities that take the lesson into another domain of writing and/or to the next step in the taxonomy and also provide across the curriculum ideas for writing assignments at that particular thinking level, when applicable. After pilot-testing these lessons during the 1982–83 school year, we returned to UCI the following two summers under a three-year grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to evaluate and refine our model, to revise what we had written, to create an additional 90 lessons, and to develop plans for disseminating our work.

Constructing the Ladder

Each time I present the Thinking/Writing model to classroom teachers, I am reminded that one concrete demonstration lesson is worth a thousand words and that actively engaging my audience in some or all of the stages of the composing process is the best way to ensure that they have an opportunity to move from knowledge and comprehension of our lessons to application, analysis, and synthesis of their own. What follows is a sequence of prewriting and precomposing activities from an analysis-level lesson designed to demonstrate to teachers how they might provide students with practice in literary interpretation, a skill in which they are especially deficient (according to *Reading, Thinking and Writing*). Although geared for the college level, the complete lesson has been used successfully with students in the 9th and 11th grades.[3]

SETTING AS A MIRROR OF CHARACTER IN TENNYSON'S "MARIANA"

LESSON ABSTRACT:

Students will interpret a poem and write an analysis of the way in which setting is a mirror of character.

PREWRITING:

Step 1—Introducing the Concept of Setting as a Mirror of Character.

To generate interest in the idea that setting is often a mirror of character, start with the familiar. Select a popular television show and initiate a discussion that focuses on where the show takes place, why it takes place where it does, and what the environment tells us about the character. As students volunteer information, visually represent their ideas on the board. A cluster of ideas about "Magnum PI," for example, might look like Figure 3.

To prepare students for the setting of the particular poem they will interpret, "Mariana," it is also helpful to mention a television show like "Dynasty" or "Dallas," where both the exterior and interior of the house are reflections of the inhabitants as well as a backdrop for much of the show's action.

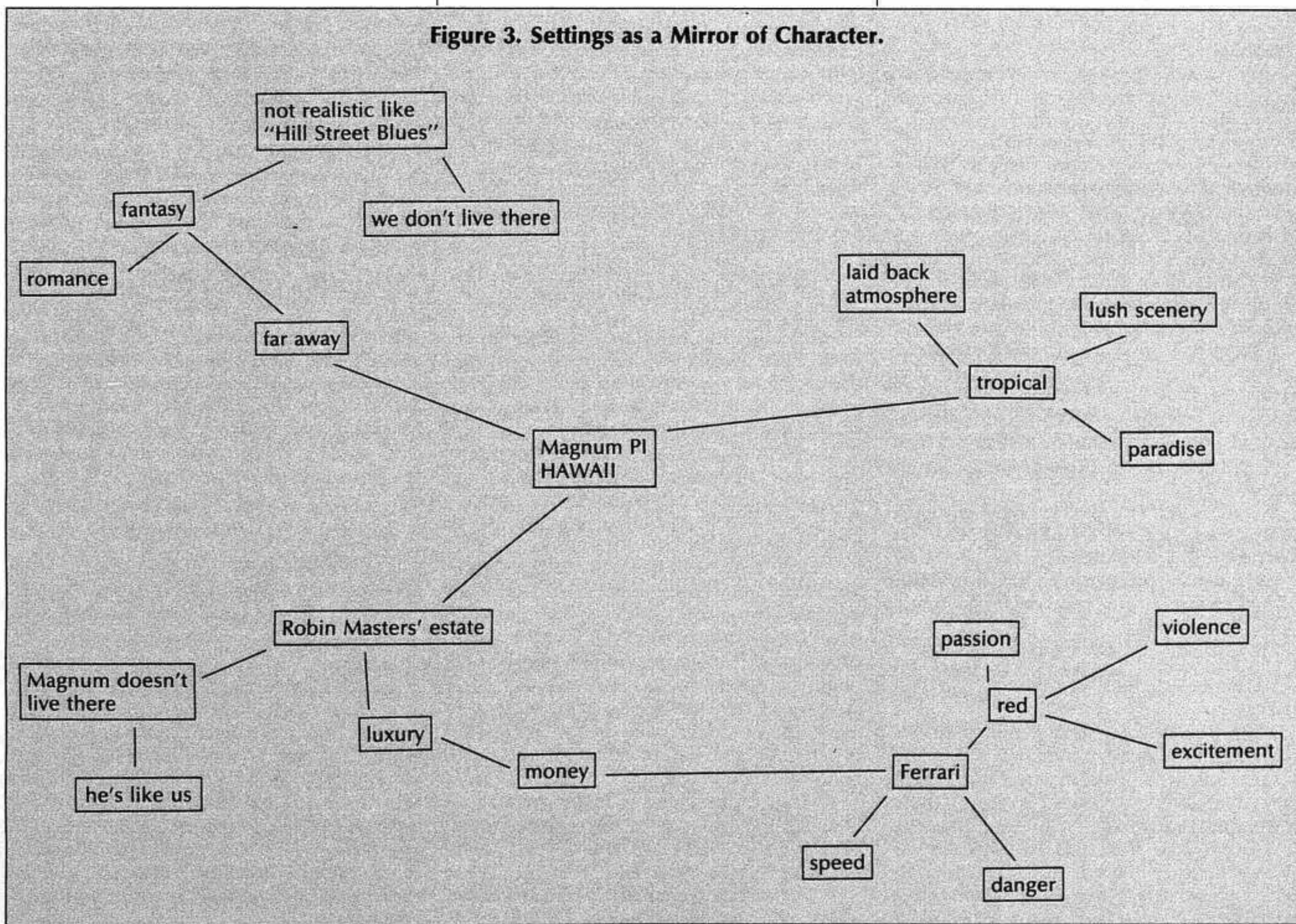


Figure 3. Settings as a Mirror of Character.

Figure 4. Interpretation of Settings.

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3	Column 4	Column 5
ITEMS IN OR AROUND MY HOME (A BRIEF DESCRIPTION)	WHAT I THINK THESE ITEMS SAY ABOUT ME TO OTHERS.	WHAT THESE ITEMS *DO* SAY ABOUT ME TO OTHERS. Response #1.	WHAT THESE ITEMS *DO* SAY ABOUT ME TO OTHERS. Response #2.	WHAT THESE ITEMS *DO* SAY ABOUT ME TO OTHERS. Response #3.
1. Shade garden filled with camellias, ferns, and cymbidiums.	1. Plants are my companions and my hobby.	1. Very romantic garden. Likes a place to go to feel "civilized."	1. You like to get next to nature.	1. The kind of plants you like convey a mood—something about tranquility.
2. Heavy, graceful wrought iron candelabra chandelier over dining area. Candles are the only light in the room.	2. Quiet dining is pleasant and candlelight brings peaceful moments.	2. Very elegant and refined.	2. A person who appreciates craftsmanship and history of people.	2. Like the shade garden, this space says, "Slow down. Relax. Enjoy."
3. Oak étagère filled with cut crystal, silver pieces, and our stereo tape player and tuner.	3. The past is important and music is my passion.	3. Likes to conceal modern things with old, graceful things.	3. A person who likes elegant things.	3. Your objects are like works of art to be appreciated over time.
4. Three stair step redwood decks down the hill behind our home.	4. Outdoors is vital and intriguing. I spend much time outside.	4. Luxury. Three decks. That's a lot of room for sunning.	4. You like to get outside.	4. Can't get a reading on this. Are they in the sun? Perhaps they show the more extroverted side of you.

Step 2—Applying Setting to Your Own Character

After establishing a knowledge base about setting in a medium that students can identify with, turn their attention to the way in which their own environment defines who they are. Pass out a blank chart to students with these instructions:

1. List in column 1 four items in or around your home that have some meaning for you. (Be as descriptive as possible.)

2. Think about what these items might say about you to others and record your ideas in column 2.

3. Fold column 1 to the right so that it covers column 2 and pass your chart to another student. That student should read the list in column 1, interpret the significance of these items, and record in column 3 what the items say to him or her about you.

4. Fold column 1 to the right so that it now covers columns 2 and 3 and pass that chart to a new responder.

5. Repeat the interpreting and commenting activity until three responders have had a chance to react.

A completed chart might look like Figure 4.

Step 3—Showing, not Telling, About Character Through Setting

After students have applied setting to their own lives by listing items in their home and practiced interpreting the lists of others, give them an opportunity to synthesize this information by creating their own characters and settings. Introduce the concept of showing rather than telling about a character through rich sensory detail.[4] To illustrate, develop several telling sentences like: "The blind woman was terrified of unfamiliar places" or "The amusement park was run down and depressing." Without using that sentence, write several paragraphs that exemplify these statements. Once students have discussed the models, give them the following telling sentence:

The state that her house was in made it clear that she had long since ceased to care about herself.

Have students underline in the sentence what it is that they will have to show about the character through their description of setting, and discuss this as a group. Give students 10 minutes to write.

After students have completed their "showing paragraphs," ask them what they had to think about in order to get started. Some will have to visualize—to construct a mental picture of the surroundings—before they write. Others will need to conjure up a memory out of which to weave an imaginary character. For some students establishing a point of view will be the prerequisite for starting, while others must begin by describing a room in the house (very often the kitchen) before widening the camera lens to take in the complete panorama. Here are two sample openings from this exercise:

- "The dripping faucet made greasy rivulets on the mounds of dirty dishes, now beginning to take on a life of their own, piled high in the sink."
- "'Come on down!' the voice from the television shouted. She reached for the remote control and sent a spaghetti stained plate and four empty beer cans to the floor. No matter. One voice was as good as another. I wonder what day this is, she thought to herself."

Allow at least as much time for students to share their experiences as for the writing itself. Most students have rarely thought about their own writing process, and they are often intrigued by this discussion. Asking if people got stuck in their writing, why it happened, and how they were able to move forward again also elicits important insights about composing. Finally, ask for volunteers to share what they have written. As the pieces are read aloud, listen for differing approaches to showing as well as for memorable words and phrases. Make a comment about what each student did particularly well.

THE ASSIGNMENT:

Once you have stimulated the students' interest in looking at how setting reflects character in literature, give them the following assignment:

In standard expository form (introduction, main body, conclusion), discuss the way in which setting is a mirror of character in "Mariana." Refer to specific images and symbols that Tennyson used to reveal the psychological state of Mariana and interpret their significance. After carefully analyzing the poem, draw some conclusions about Tennyson's attitude toward Mariana. Does he feel her grief is natural or unnatural?

PRECOMPOSING:

The following activities are specifically geared to the assignment on which students will write and are arranged to facilitate the formulation of a writing plan.

Step 4—Pointing

Read Tennyson's poem aloud to the class. Ask students to listen carefully and to use Peter Elbow's technique of "pointing" (underlining words and phrases that stand out for them) to the elements in the setting that say something about the internal psychology of Mariana (see box).

Step 5—Paraphrasing

To ensure that students comprehend what they have read, ask several class members to put into their own words what they think the poem is about.

Follow each theme statement with a request for students to locate the line or lines from which they derived their interpretation. For example, if a student says that the poem is about someone who lives a death-in-life existence, turn the discussion to the poem's refrain ("I am aweary . . . ") and ask the students to consider why it is repeated so often.

MARIANA

'Mariana in the moated grange.'
Measure for Measure

With blackest moss the flower-pots
Were thickly crusted, one and all;
The rusted nails fell from the knots
That held the pear to the gable-wall.
The broken sheds look'd sad and strange:
Unlifted was the clinking latch;
Weeded and worn the ancient thatch
Upon the lonely moated grange.
She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'

Her tears fell with the dews at even;
Her tears fell ere the dews were dried;
She could not look on the sweet heaven,
Either at morn or eventide.
After the flitting of the bats,
When thickest dark did trance the sky,
She drew her casement-curtain by,
And glanced athwart the glooming flats.
She only said, 'The night is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'

Upon the middle of the night,
Waking she heard the night-fowl crow;
The cock sung out an hour ere light;
From the dark fen the oxen's low
Came to her; without hope of change,
In sleep she seem'd to walk forlorn,
Till cold winds woke the gray-eyed morn.
About the lonely moated grange.
She only said, 'The night is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'
About a stone-cast from the wall
A sluice with blacken'd waters slept,
And o'er it many, round and small
The cluster'd marish-mosses crept.
Hard by a poplar shook alway,
All silver-green with gnarled bark:
For leagues no other tree did mark
The level waste, the rounding gray,
She only said, 'My life is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'

And ever when the moon was low,
And the shrill winds were up and away,
In the white curtain, to and fro,
She saw the gusty shadow sway.
But when the moon was very low,
And wild winds bound within their cell,
The shadow of the poplar fell
Upon her bed, across her brow.
She only said, 'The night is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'

All day within the dreamy house,
The doors upon their hinges creak'd;
The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,
Or from the crevice peer'd about.
Old faces glimmer'd thro' the doors,
Old footsteps trod the upper floors,
Old voices called her from without.
She only said, 'The night is dreary,
He cometh not,' she said;
She said, 'I am aweary, aweary,
I would that I were dead!'

The sparrow's chirrup on the roof,
The slow clock ticking, and the sound
Which to the wooing wind aloof
The poplar made, did all confound
Her sense; but most she loathed the hour
When the thick-moted sunbeam lay
Athwart the chambers, and the day
Was sloping toward his western bower.
Then said she, 'I am very dreary,
He will not come,' she said;
She wept, 'I am aweary, aweary,
O God, that I were dead!'

—Alfred Lord Tennyson

Figure 5. Interpretations of Textual References.

Items in the landscape that say something about Mariana	*What these items mean to me*	*What Tennyson might be trying to say*
Rusted nails, broken shed, weeds	Neglect	Mariana has let things fall apart. She no longer cares about appearances.
Unlifted hatch	Isolation Loneliness	No one comes but also Mariana doesn't go out.
Lonely moated grange	Not a real moat—not on a farm	Mariana builds a moat of isolation.
Sluice with blackened waters	Stagnation	Instead of being a symbol of life, water is a symbol of death-in-life. Even her tears are not cleansing. So her grief is not natural.
Poplar tree	Life? Death? Lost love?	Something is calling to Mariana. It's "wooing" her; but she refuses to listen.
Casement-curtain	Refusal to face life	Mariana purposely shuts out the light and hope.
Blue fly in pane/mouse behind wainscot	Entrapment	Mariana is imprisoned in her own mind. She is haunted by the past; the present is only waiting; and the future is death.

"Our goal is to give students enough guided practice to eventually internalize a set of conceptual strategies that they can apply to future thinking/writing challenges."

Step 6—Listing, Interpreting, Commenting

Students often make global statements about literature without supporting their premises with specific evidence from the text. Help them generate a list of textual references that they can interpret and comment on by having them fill out a chart similar to the one they developed during prewriting (see Figure 5). Encourage them to move beyond the opening stanza of the poem.

After the charts have been filled out, you may wish to initiate a large-group discussion, or have students share their ideas in peer groups or work in pairs.

Step 7—The Microtheme: Formulating A Writing Plan

Students are now ready to organize their ideas and information about the relationship of setting to character into a writing plan. Force them to think ahead, to consider how they will proceed, by asking them to create a "microtheme" (Bean, Drenk, and Lee, 1982). On 3x5 cards or a piece of paper, have students write the categories—Introduction, Main Body, Conclusion. Under Introduction, ask them to describe three different ways they might begin their paper: quote, anecdote, general analytic statement, description, and so on. Under Main Body, request that they list six specific references to the text and the main points they will be used to support. Under Conclusion, suggest that they write a paragraph in which they summarize their perception of Tennyson's attitude toward Mariana. This microtheme should be viewed only as a point of departure in writing, a guideline for how students will communicate their ideas rather than an outline of precisely what they are going to say.

These preceding activities constitute the rungs in the ladder—moving from knowledge through synthesis—that will prepare students to write a literary analysis. Subsequent steps in the lesson include: suggestions for a rapid read-around of everyone's introduction, guidelines for peer group sharing of the first draft, a set of self-evaluation questions for revision, editing directions with a focus on the rules for quoting from the text, and an evaluation scoring guide based on a 1–9 point rubric that students would receive at the time they were given the assignment.

Reactions to Thinking/Writing

My workshop is almost over. A woman in the back who has not said one word all day looks exasperated, so I ask her if she'd like to react to what she's heard so far.

"Well, this may be relevant for teachers who have college-bound students; but I have the slow kids, and they just can't do this."

"I totally disagree," says a voice behind her. "This would be great for my Basic Comp class, but I know my Honors students won't do all this prewriting and precomposing. They'd get bored."

My kids can't*; I've heard it as often as Mariana's refrain. But* my students won't *is a new one. I think about how to reply . . .*

"Before you both write this concept off," I begin, "you might want to give it a try. It seems to me that the 'slow' kids,

"As a facilitator and a guide, the teacher can create an environment that activates discovery and, thereby, fosters learning."

those with the least practice, need the ladder the most. As for the 'bright' kids, if they don't need the structure it's probably because they have already internalized the necessary steps for solving that particular thinking/writing problem. For those students, you can increase the complexity of the content on which the writing will be based, or stay with the same content but target for a higher level thinking skill."

"I have a problem with this, too," another teacher volunteers. "I'm really uncomfortable with all the handholding that's going on in your lessons. Aren't you really doing the thinking for the students?"

"That question really used to bother me, too. In fact, I used to be the kind of teacher who required that my students hand in their paper on the existential quest in Invisible Man *the day* before *our class discussion on the novel so that they couldn't 'steal' ideas from each other. But I've reassessed my role as a teacher since then, and my priorities have changed. No single written product is really that important. What I'm really after is the process—helping students develop a set of conceptual strategies that can be applied to other writing tasks as well as solving problems that will confront them in everyday life. If you feel uneasy with this, though, take students through the prewriting and precomposing stages and, then, instead of having them write that assignment, move directly to the next assignment in the sequence, leaving them to construct the ladder on their own. With the "Mariana" lesson, for example, the extension activity is to compare and contrast Tennyson's use of setting as a mirror of Mariana's psychological state with Dickens' portrait of Miss Havisham via her surroundings in* Great Expectations.

A woman has been anxiously awaiting her turn to speak, and, having completed my response to the handholding objection, I call on her.

"I just want to say that I really like this whole model. I think the way most of us have been teaching writing is like baseball."

She pauses to collect her thoughts, and we all wait and wonder.

"You see, we dress students up, we show them how to hold the bat, and we encourage them to take a few practice swings. Then, when they're really psyched up, we get them up to the plate and we strike them out, and we strike them out, and we strike them out. Why can't we throw them a slow pitch for once and see how far they can hit it?"

The teachers are nodding. They understand and they agree! I make a mental imprint of her analogy for future use and rest my case.□

[1]We are indebted to Linda Flower and John Hayes for their work on the importance of planning and composing. Their influence inspired us to add a planning phase, which we call precomposing, to the stage process model.

[2]James Moffet's writing sequences in *Active Voice*—which involve a progression in overall types of writing, specific models, audience, time, space, and perception—were influential and validating.

[3]Since most of our high school and college lessons run 10–15 pages, it was not possible to include an entire demonstration lesson. To obtain a complete sample lesson, please write to my assistant, Henia Alony, UCI Writing Project, Office of Teacher Education, University of California, Irvine, Irvine, CA 92717. Please specify the grade level and the thinking level you are interested in.

[4]For further information about the concept of showing not telling, see *Showing Writing: A Training Program to Help Students Be Specific* by Rebekah Caplan and Cathy Keech. (University of California, Berkeley (Bay Area Writing Project, Collaborative Research Study No. 2).

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