

LITERATURE FOR COMPOSITION

ESSAYS, FICTION, POETRY, AND DRAMA

SYLVAN BARNET

WILLIAM BURTO

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MARCIA STUBBS

An abstract painting featuring a person with dark hair, seen from the back, sitting on a red and blue striped surface. They are looking out a window. The wall to the left is a warm orange-yellow, while the view through the window is a deep, dark blue. A plant with green leaves and pink flowers sits on a surface in front of the window. The overall style is expressive and painterly.

SIXTH EDITION

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Literature for Composition

Essays, Fiction, Poetry, and Drama

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Resources for Writers

The sixth edition of *Literature for Composition* offers abundant material that will assist readers to engage in the processes of critical thinking and argumentative writing. Here we give a highly abbreviated guide to the material concerning the writing process, from initial ideas to the final persuasive essay. Please consult the table of contents for complete guidance.

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Preface to Instructors

This book is based on the assumption that students in composition or literature courses should encounter first-rate writing—not simply competent prose but the powerful reports of experience that have been recorded by highly skilled writers of the past and present—reports of experiences that *must* be shared. Our view is not original—a thousand years ago, in Japan, Lady Murasaki (978?–1026) in *The Tale of Genji* wrote a scene in which some of her characters talk about reading fiction, and one of them offers his opinion as to why an author writes:

Again and again writers find something in their experience, or see something in the life around them, that seems so important they cannot bear to let it pass into oblivion. There must never come a time, the writer feels, when people do not know about this.

We assume that you share our belief that the study of such writing offers pleasure and insight into life and also leads to increased skill in communicating.

If we were asked to give, very briefly, the key features of *Literature for Composition*, Sixth Edition, here is what we would say:

KEY FEATURES

Extensive Instruction in Composition. Students are guided through the entire process of writing, beginning with generating ideas (for instance, by listing or by annotating a text), developing a thesis, and on through the final stages of documenting and editing. Many examples of student writing are included.

Strategies for Writing Effective Arguments. The sixth edition focuses on argument and evaluation, not only in the case studies but also in the Topics for Critical Thinking and Writing that follow most of the readings. We emphasize the importance of questioning your own assumptions—a key principle in critical thinking—and we also emphasize the importance of setting forth thoughtful responses in the form of coherent, readable arguments.

Abundant Visual Material. The book is rich in photographs, paintings, and facsimiles of manuscripts. The images are chosen to enhance the reader's understanding of particular works of literature. For example, we include photos of Buffalo Bill and a facsimile of a draft of E. E. Cummings's poem about Buffalo Bill (to our knowledge, never before published in a textbook). We also print previously unpublished manuscript material for Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery." These images emphasize visual learning and critical thinking.

Introductory Genre Anthology. After preliminary chapters on getting ideas and thinking critically, students encounter chapters devoted to essays, fiction, drama, and poetry.

Thematic Anthology. Works are arranged under six themes (two are new): Love and Hate; Gender Roles: Making Men and Women; Innocence and Experience; Identity in America; Art and Life; and Law and Disorder.

Case Studies. Ten case studies are included to give a variety of perspectives for writing and research: Ralph Ellison, Flannery O'Connor, Emily Dickinson, Raymond Carver, Barbie and Gender, *Hamlet*, American Indian Identity, Literary Visions (Word and Image), the Sacco–Vanzetti Trial, and Shirley Jackson.

Extensive Material on Research and the Internet. Because instructors are increasingly assigning research papers, the sixth edition includes material on short, medium-length, and long research papers on literature and history, and it provides up-to-date instruction on evaluating, using, and citing electronic sources.

Emphasis on Critical Thinking. Connected to reading and writing, critical thinking is at the heart of the first four chapters and is kept in view throughout the book, most visibly in the Topics for Critical Thinking and Writing that follow each literary selection, and in Chapters 17 and 18, “Arguing an Interpretation” and “Arguing an Evaluation.”

Word and Image. The visual material includes a color insert, which is a case study featuring eleven paintings that are the subjects of poems. Students analyze the poems and paintings and offer evidence to support their arguments.

ORGANIZATION

Literature for Composition, Sixth Edition, is in large part an anthology of literature, but it is more—it also offers instruction in writing.

Part I, “Getting Started: From Response to Argument,” consists of six chapters with thirty-two short works of literature. The aim of all the chapters in Part I is to help students read and respond—in writing—to literature. The first two chapters discuss annotating, free writing, and listing; the third and fourth chapters discuss writing explications and analyses; and the fifth chapter discusses other kinds of writing, including parody, stories based on stories, and poems based on poems. These chapters include six examples of student writing, all of which are accompanied by the preliminary journal entries or drafts that helped produce them. Chapter 6, “Reading and Writing about Visual Culture,” includes two essays by students and a generous group of photographs for analysis.

Part II, “Up Close: Thinking about Literary Works and Literary Forms,” begins with a discussion of critical thinking (Chapter 7). This chapter invites students to analyze, especially by means of comparison, (1) a photograph of Buffalo Bill and Sitting Bull; (2) E. E. Cummings’s poem “Buffalo Bill ’s,” and (3) the manuscript draft of the poem. The next nine chapters introduce the students to four genres: the essay (Chapter 8), fiction (Chapters 9–12), drama (Chapters 13 and 14), and poetry (Chapters 15 and 16). The chapter on the essay includes four essays, and additional essays appear in the later thematic chapters. The four chapters on fiction, which include a chapter on filmed fiction, present twelve stories, with case studies on Ralph Ellison’s “Battle Royal” and Flannery O’Connor. The two chapters on drama include three plays; the two chapters on poetry include twenty-eight poems, with a case study on Emily Dickinson. Suggested topics for discussion and examples of student writing (annotations, journal entries, drafts, and final essays) help students think critically and develop arguments about the material. Part II, then, offers a small anthology of literature organized by genre, as well as abundant guidance in thinking and writing about literature.

Part III, “Standing Back: Arguing Interpretations and Evaluations, and Understanding Critical Strategies,” consists of three chapters: “Arguing an Interpretation” (Chapter 17), “Arguing an Evaluation” (Chapter 18), and “Writing about Literature: An Overview” (Chapter 19). Our idea is this: If instructors begin the course by assigning some or all of the chapters in Parts I and II, by now the students have read enough literature to be in a good position to think further about the assumptions underlying the analytic interpretations and evaluations they are writing.

About seventy-five literary texts appear in Parts I, II, and III; another two hundred appear in Part IV, “A Thematic Anthology,” where they are grouped into six themes: Love and Hate, Gender Roles: Making Men and Women, Innocence and Experience, Identity in America, Art and Life, and Law and Disorder. Here, as earlier, almost all of the essays, stories, plays, and poems are followed by questions to stimulate critical thinking and writing.

The book concludes with five appendices: “Remarks about Manuscript Form,” “Writing a Research Paper,” “New Approaches to the Research Paper: Literature, History, and the World Wide Web,” “Literary Research: Print and Electronic Resources,” and “Glossary of Literary Terms.” The material on manuscript form may seem to be yet another discussion of writing, and some readers may wonder why it is put near the back of the book. But manuscript form is less a matter of drafting and revising than it is of editing. It is, so to speak, the final packaging of a product that develops during a complicated process, a process that begins with reading, responding, and finding a topic, a thesis (supported by evidence), and a voice, not with worrying about the width of margins or the form of citations. The last thing done in writing an essay, and therefore almost the last thing presented in our book, is to set it forth in a physical form fit for human consumption.

WHAT IS NEW IN THE SIXTH EDITION?

Instructors familiar with earlier editions will notice major changes in this edition, some of which we have already mentioned. Here, for the convenience of instructors who have used an earlier edition, we will list the major changes:

Increased Coverage of Argument

The emphasis on the connection between critical thinking—very largely a matter of arguing with yourself, i.e., questioning your assumptions and early responses—has been heightened and more evidently connected with issues of setting forth a thesis in an essay. Because instructors often assign students to explicate a passage and because students may think that an explication is merely a paraphrase, we have added a unit called “Explication as Argument.”

New Case Studies

We now have ten case studies. These are varied and do not simply consist of a literary work followed by a number of critical interpretations. Rather, we include previously unpublished manuscripts, comments by the authors, and visual material. We have retained case studies on Ralph Ellison’s “Battle Royal,” Flannery