

BRIDGES

Literature across Cultures

Gilbert H. Muller
John A. Williams





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About the Authors

Gilbert H. Muller, who received a Ph.D. in English and American literature from Stanford University, is currently professor of English and special assistant to the president at the LaGuardia campus of the City University of New York. He has also taught at Stanford, Vassar, and several universities overseas. Dr. Muller is the author of the award-winning *Nightmares and Visions: Flannery O'Connor and the Catholic Grotesque*, *Chester Himes*, and other critical studies. His essays and reviews have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The New Republic*, *The Nation*, *The Sewanee Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and elsewhere. He is also a noted author and editor of textbooks in English and composition, including *The Short Prose Reader* with Harvey Wiener and, with John A. Williams, *The McGraw-Hill Introduction to Literature* and *Ways In: Approaches to Reading and Writing about Literature*. Among Dr. Muller's awards are National Endowment for the Humanities Fellowships, a Fulbright Fellowship, and a Mellon Fellowship.

John A. Williams, the Paul Robeson Professor of English at Rutgers University, is the author of twelve novels, among them *The Man Who Cried I Am* (1967), *!Click Song* (1982), *Jacob's Ladder* (1987), and *Trio: Clifford's Blues* (1994); ten nonfiction works that include studies on Richard Wright and Martin Luther King, Jr. (1970), Richard Pryor (1991), and Malcolm X (1993). In addition, he has edited or co-edited ten books, among them *The McGraw-Hill Introduction to Literature* (1985). A former journalist, Williams is also a poet and playwright and a recipient of the Rutgers University Lindback Foundation Award for Distinguished Teaching.

To
Laleh, Parisa, and Darius
And to
Lori, Greg, Dennis, and Adam
And as well to
Margo, John Gregory, Nancy, and David

P r e f a c e

Writing and reading are not all that distinct for a writer. Both exercises require being alert and reading for unaccountable beauty, for the intricateness or simple elegance of the writer's imagination, for the world that the imagination evokes.

Toni Morrison
Playing in the Dark

Bridges, an anthology of literature from the many American cultures as well as cultures around the world, is suited ideally for today's composition and introductory literature courses. Offering a blend of classic favorites and selections from other cultures, the text contains some 300 stories, poems, and plays from the six habitable continents of our world. Among the authors are twelve Nobel Laureates, twelve Pulitzer Prize designees, twenty-six National Book Award recipients, twenty-two American Book Award winners, and many other prize-winning writers. These superlative authors, together with other outstanding talents, many of them minority and women writers, celebrate the diversity of our expanded literary canon.

We have created a mix of writers who have been world standard-bearers of literature as well as those relatively less well known. These authors, ranging from Sophocles to Sandra Cisneros, span classic to contemporary times, illustrating just how diverse yet at the same time how similar we are. Literature, of course, is a reflection of humanity. It transcends national and international borders. It allows us to understand, as we certainly must, that we truly are one people, alone as far as we know, in this "distant corner of the sky." Literature, when we read enough of it, can be discovery.

Once, the literature we studied was classified as "Western." With few exceptions the designation excluded the greater portion of the world and the literatures its various



peoples produced. Our own national literature was shaped frequently by Western or Eurocentric imperatives, but here, too, many important literary viewpoints are overlooked.

Perhaps more than any other country, the United States reflects the cultures of the world, and for this reason *Bridges* offers a rich presentation of writing by African Americans, Latinos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. These cultures, framed by ethnic history and custom, have in turn been reshaped by mainstream forces creating what has been called the “American experience,” even as they have influenced and modified that experience, making our literature far richer.

Ultimately, *Bridges* is both an American and a global anthology. The text is organized around five themes that relate to situations people share universally: children and families, women and men, caste and class, war and peace, faith and doubt. We find these universal themes expressed by writers of every period, from ancient Egyptians and Greeks to those of contemporary times—each experience colored by place, custom, and point of view.

Within each thematic chapter readers will encounter sections on fiction, poetry, and drama. Each of these subsections contains the work of authors presenting culturally discrete but also shared experiences of the human condition. Questions for discussion and writing follow all fiction and drama selections and many poems; end-of-section apparatus permits comparative assessment of authors. With chapter introductions, a glossary of literary terms, and a biographical dictionary, *Bridges* is a complete literary anthology alerting students to the many imaginative worlds that major authors invite them to share. This, to us, is the finest definition of cultural literacy.

Supplementing this anthology is a companion text, *Ways In: Approaches to Reading and Writing about Literature*. This succinct guide contains six chapters on critical reading; the writing process; the elements of fiction, poetry, and drama; and approaches to the research paper. Numerous literary examples correlated with *Bridges*, along with sample student essays, make *Ways In* a valuable ancillary text for teachers who want to stress literary appreciation and critical writing in their classrooms.

Instructor’s guides are available for both texts.

In *A Room of One’s Own*, Virginia Woolf speaks of the collaborative effort—the marriage of opposites—that men and women must bring to the creative process if literary artists are to communicate experience “with perfect fullness.” Such literature invites careful readings and excited rereadings, and ultimately the reconciliation of diverse viewpoints. This is the sort of literature we seek to present in *Bridges*—literature that is luminous, provocative, and culturally complete.

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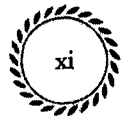
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