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Ways of Reading

AN ANTHOLOGY FOR WRITERS

— SECOND EDITION —

David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky

WAYS OF READING

An Anthology for Writers

Second Edition

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Preface

Ways of Reading is designed for a course where students are given the opportunity to work on what they read, and to work on it by writing. When we began developing such courses, we realized the problems our students had when asked to write or talk about what they read were not "reading problems," at least not as these are strictly defined. Our students knew how to move from one page to the next. They could read sentences. They had, obviously, been able to carry out many of the versions of reading required for their education—skimming textbooks, cramming for tests, strip-mining books for term papers.

Our students, however, felt powerless in the face of serious writing, in the face of long and complicated texts—the kinds of texts we thought they should find interesting and challenging. We thought (as many teachers have thought) that if we just, finally, gave them something good to read—something rich and meaty—they would change forever their ways of thinking about English. It didn't work, of course. The issue is not only *what* students read, but what they can learn to *do* with what they read. We learned that the problems our students had lay not in the reading material (it was too hard) or in the students (they were poorly prepared) but in the classroom—in the ways we and they imagined what it meant to work on an essay.

There is no better place to work on reading than in a writing course, and this book is intended to provide occasions for readers to write. You will find a number of distinctive features in *Ways of Reading*. For one thing, it contains selections you don't usually see in a college reader: long, powerful, mysterious pieces like John Berger's "Ways of Seeing," Stanley Fish's "How to Recognize a Poem When You See One," Adrienne Rich's "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision," Clifford Geertz's "Deep Play:

Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," Thomas Kuhn's "The Historical Structure of Scientific Discovery," John Edgar Wideman's "Our Time," Julia Kristeva's "Stabat Mater," and Saul Bellow's "A Silver Dish." These are the sorts of readings we talk about when we talk with our colleagues. We have learned that we can talk about them with our students as well.

When we chose the essays and stories, we were looking for "readable" texts—that is, texts that leave some work for a reader to do. We wanted selections that invite students to be active, critical readers, that present powerful readings of common experience, that open up the familiar world and make it puzzling, rich, and problematic. We wanted to choose selections that invite students to be active readers and to take responsibility for their acts of interpretation. So we avoided the short set-pieces you find in so many anthologies. In a sense, those short selections misrepresent the act of reading. They can be read in a single sitting; they make arguments that can be easily paraphrased; they solve all the problems they raise; they wrap up Life and put it into a box; and so they turn reading into an act of appreciation, where the most that seems to be required is a nod of the head. And they suggest that a writer's job is to do just that, to write a piece that is similarly tight and neat and self-contained. We wanted to avoid pieces that were so plainly written or tightly bound that there was little for students to do but "get the point."

We learned that if our students had reading problems when faced with long and complex texts, the problems lay in the way they imagined a reader—the role a reader plays, what a reader does, why a reader reads (if not simply to satisfy the requirements of a course). When, for example, our students were puzzled by what they read, they took this as a sign of failure. ("It doesn't make any sense," they would say, as though the sense were supposed to be waiting on the page, ready for them the first time they read through.) And our students were haunted by the thought that they couldn't remember everything they had read (as though one could store all of Geertz's "Deep Play" in memory); or if they did remember bits and pieces, they felt that the fragmented text they possessed was evidence that they could not do what they were supposed to do. Our students were confronting the experience of reading, in other words, but they were taking the problems of reading—problems all readers face—and concluding that there was nothing for them to do but give up.

As expert readers, we have all learned what to do with a complex text. We know that we can go back to a text; we don't have to remember it—in fact, we've learned to mark up a text to ease that re-entry. We know that a reader is a person who puts together fragments. Those coherent readings we construct begin with confusion and puzzlement, and we construct those readings by writing and rewriting—by working on a text.

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These are the lessons our students need to learn, and this is why a course in reading is also a course in writing. Our students need to learn that there is something they can do once they have first read through a complicated text; successful reading is not just a matter of "getting" an essay the first time. In a very real sense, you can't begin to feel the power a reader has until you realize the problems, until you realize that no one "gets" Geertz or Rich or Kuhn or Wideman all at once. You work on what you read, and then what you have at the end is something that is yours, something you made. And this is what the teaching apparatus in *Ways of Reading* is designed to do. In a sense, it says to students, "OK, let's get to work on these essays; let's see what you can make of them."

This, then, is the second distinctive feature you will find in *Ways of Reading:* reading and writing assignments designed to give students access to the essays and stories. After each selection, for example, you will find "Questions for a Second Reading." We wanted to acknowledge that rereading is a natural way of carrying out the work of a reader, just as rewriting is a natural way of completing the work of a writer. It is not something done out of despair or as a punishment for not getting things right the first time. The questions we have written highlight what we see as central textual or interpretive problems. Geertz, for example, divides his essay into seven sections, each written in a different style. By going back through the essay with this in mind and by asking what Geertz is doing in each case (what his method is and what it enables him to accomplish), a student is in a position to see the essay as the enactment of a method and not just as a long argument with its point hidden away at the end. These questions might serve as preparations for class discussion or ways of directing students' work in journals. Whatever the case, they both honor and direct the work of rereading.

Each selection is also followed by two sets of writing assignments, "Assignments for Writing" and "Making Connections." The first set directs students back into the work they have just read. While the assignments vary, there are some basic principles behind them. They ask students to work on the essay by focusing on difficult or problematic moments in the text; they ask students to work on the author's examples, extending and testing his or her methods of analysis; or they ask students to apply the method of the essay (its way of seeing and understanding the world) to settings or experiences of their own. Students are asked, for example, to give a "Geertzian" reading to scenes from their own immediate culture (the behavior of teenagers at a shopping mall, characteristic styles in decorating a dorm room) and they are asked to imagine that they are working alongside Geertz and making his project their own. Or they are asked to consider the key examples in Rich's "When We Dead Awaken" (poems from

various points in her career) to see how as writers they might use the key terms of her argument ("structures of oppression," "re-naming") in representing their own experience. The last assignments—"Making Connections"—invite students to read one essay in the context of another, to see, for example, if Kuhn's account of the "historical structure" of a discovery might be used to chart the stages in the development of Rich's poems or in Geertz's work on the Balinese cockfight. In a sense, then, the essays are offered as models, but not as "prose models" in the strictest sense. What they model is a way of seeing or reading the world, of both imagining problems and imagining methods to make those problems available to a writer.

At the end of the book, we have included several longer assignment sequences and a goodly number of shorter sequences. In some cases these incorporate single assignments from earlier in the book; in most cases they involve students in projects that extend anywhere from two to three weeks for the shorter sequences to an entire semester's worth of work for the longer ones. Almost all the sequences include several of the stories or essays in the anthology and require a series of separate drafts and revisions. In academic life, readers seldom read single essays in isolation, as though one were "finished" with Geertz after a week or two. Rather, they read with a purpose—with a project in mind or a problem to solve. The assignment sequences are designed to give students a feel for the rhythm and texture of an extended academic project. They offer, that is, one more way of reading and writing. Because these sequences lead students through intellectual projects proceeding from one week to the next, they enable them to develop authority as specialists, to feel the difference between being an expert and being a "common" reader on a single subject. And, with the luxury of time available for self-reflection, students can look back on what they have done, not only to revise what they know and the methods that enable what they know but also to take stock and comment on the value and direction of their work.

Because of their diversity, it is difficult to summarize the assignment sequences. Perhaps the best way to see what we have done is to turn to the back of the book and look at them. We have made them short enough to leave room for an individual instructor's desire to add assignments, to spend additional time on single essays, or to mix one sequence with another. They are meant to frame a project for students but to leave open possibilities for new directions.

You will also notice that there are few "glosses" appended to the essays. We have not added many editors' notes to define difficult words or to identify names or allusions to other authors or artists. We've omitted them because their presence suggests something we feel is false about reading. They suggest that good readers know all the words or pick up all the al-

lusions or recognize every name that is mentioned. This is not true. Good readers do what they can and try their best to fill in the blanks; they ignore seemingly unimportant references and look up the important ones. There is no reason for students to feel they lack the knowledge necessary to complete a reading of these texts. We have translated foreign phrases and glossed some technical terms, but we have kept the selections as clean and open as possible.

Several of our reviewers asked us why we had included short stories in the collection. Perhaps the best answer is because we love to teach them. We think of them as having a status similar to that of the nonfiction case studies in the book: Thomas Cottle and Stephen Klineberg's on Ted and Ellie Graziano, John Edgar Wideman's on his brother Robby, Gloria Steinem's on her mother, or Robert Cole's on the children of privileged families. They offer thick, readable slices of life—material rich enough for a reader's time and effort. We realize that we are ignoring traditional distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, but we are not sure that these are key distinctions in a course that presents reading as an action to be completed by writing. Students can work on Bellow's story about Woody Selbst just as they can work on Cottle and Klineberg's representation of the Grazianos.

We have also been asked on several occasions whether the readings aren't finally just too hard for students. The answer is no. Students will have to work on the selections, but that is the point of the course and the reason, as we said before, why a reading course is also a course in writing. College students want to believe that they can strike out on their own, make their mark, do something they have never done before. They want to *be* experts, not just hear from them. This is the great pleasure, as well as the great challenge, of undergraduate instruction. It is not hard to convince students they ought to be able to speak alongside of (or even speak back to) Clifford Geertz, Adrienne Rich, or Roland Barthes. And, if a teacher is patient and forgiving—willing, that is, to let a student work out a reading of Barthes, willing to keep from saying, "No, that's not it" and filling the silence with the "right" reading—then students can, with care and assistance, learn to speak for themselves. It takes a certain kind of classroom, to be sure. A teacher who teaches this book will have to be comfortable turning the essays over to the students, even with the knowledge that they will not do immediately on their own what a professional could do—at least not completely, or with the same grace and authority.

In our own teaching, we have learned that we do not have to be experts on every figure or every area of inquiry represented in this book. And, frankly, that has come as a great relief. We can have intelligent, responsible conversations about Geertz's "Deep Play" without being experts on Geertz or on anthropology or ethnography. We needed to prepare ourselves to

engage and direct students as readers, but we did not have to prepare ourselves to lecture on Kristeva or Geertz or Rich or Kuhn and what they have to say. The classes we have been teaching, and they have been some of the most exciting we have ever taught, have been classes where students—together and with their instructors—work on what these essays might mean.

So here we are, imagining students working shoulder to shoulder with Geertz and Rich and Kristeva, even talking back to them as the occasion arises. There is a wonderful Emersonian bravado in all this. But such is the case with strong and active readers. If we allow students to work on powerful texts, they will want to share the power. This is the heady fun of academic life, the real pleasure of thinking, reading, and writing. There is no reason to keep it secret from our students.

Note to the Second Edition. The second edition of *Ways of Reading* contains eleven new selections, including essays by Roland Barthes, Jean Franco, Simon Frith, Harriet Jacobs, Julia Kristeva, Mark Crispin Miller, Jane Tompkins, and Virginia Woolf and a new short story by Carlos Fuentes. Our principle of selection remained the same—we were looking for "readable" texts, pieces that instructors and students would find compelling for their subjects and methodologies, pieces, that is, that struck us as deserving of extended work. There are two new semester-long assignment sequences: one on gender and writing and one on cultural criticism. We have also added a number of shorter, "mini" sequences that vary in length by the number of selections they use and the number of assignments they ask for. The shortest of these might engage a class for two to three weeks, the longest for a month or two. We wrote these mini sequences at the request of instructors who had used the first edition and wanted more flexibility with the sequences and a wider range of projects to present to their students.

We've also updated and expanded *Resources for Teaching Ways of Reading*, adding four new essays by graduate students (including three on their work with the new assignment sequences). These essays offer advice to other graduate assistants on how to work with the book. They stand best, however, as examples of graduate students speaking frankly about their teaching with *Ways of Reading* and as examples of the kinds of papers graduate students can write when they use this book in teaching seminars.

With our colleagues, we have taught every selection in this book, including the new ones. Several of us worked together to prepare the new assignment sequences; they, too, have been tested in class. As we have traveled around giving talks, we've met many people who have used *Ways of Reading*. We have been delighted to hear them talk about how it has served their teaching, and we have learned much from their example. It is an unusual and exciting experience to see one's course turned into text, to

be read, critiqued, deconstructed, and explained. We have many people to thank, but the list that follows can't begin to name all those to whom we owe a debt, and it can't begin to express our gratitude.

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