

LITERATURE

READING

REACTING

WRITING



KIRSZNER & MANDELL



LITERATURE



Reading, Reacting, Writing



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藏书章

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HOLT, RINEHART AND WINSTON, INC.

Fort Worth Chicago San Francisco Philadelphia
Montreal Toronto London Sydney Tokyo

Publisher Ted Buchholz
Acquisitions Editor Michael Rosenberg
Development Editor Leslie Taggart
Project Editor Publications Development Company
Production Manager Kathleen Ferguson
Art & Design Supervisor Vicki McAlindon Horton
Text Design Tom Dawson, Duo Design Group
Cover Design Vicki McAlindon Horton
Composition Publications Development Company

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Address Editorial Correspondence to: 301 Commerce Street, Suite 3700, Fort Worth, TX 76102

Address Orders to: 6277 Sea Harbor Drive, Orlando, FL 32887
1-800-782-4479, or 1-800-433-0001 (in Florida)

Acknowledgments appear on pp. 1751–1765.

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Kirszner, Laurie G.

Literature—reading, reacting, writing / Laurie G. Kirszner, Stephen R. Mandell.
p. cm.

Includes index

1. English language—Rhetoric. 2. Literature—History and criticism—Theory, etc. 3. Criticism—Authorship. 4. College readers. I. Mandell, Stephen R. II. Title.

PE1479.C7K57 1990

808'.0427—dc20

90-4830
CIP

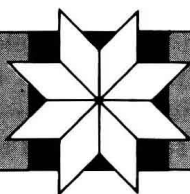
ISBN 0-03-013768-3

1 2 3 4 0 6 9 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.
The Dryden Press
Saunders College Publishing

LITERATURE

Reading, Reacting, Writing



Preface

Over the years, literature anthologies have been found by many college instructors to be ideal texts for introduction to literature courses. Because they bring together a variety of well-respected, well-liked “teachable” stories, plays, and poems, these texts provide instructors with a comprehensive, diverse collection of readings in a convenient and relatively inexpensive package.

For the most part, these anthologies have proved to be worth their (often considerable) weight in gold. Their size has permitted instructors to choose works that will have the most appeal for their particular student population and to avoid the expense, inconvenience, and ethical dilemma of duplicating. The books’ variety has offered students the opportunity to discover new writers and new works by well-known writers. Finally, the familiarity of these anthologies has enabled instructors to turn to them with ease and confidence.

The literature anthology, however, has some built-in limitations. For instance, because each of the three genres (fiction, poetry, and drama) is generally presented separately, a given reading selection may only be placed in one section of the text. As a result, important thematic connections between works of different genres are frequently difficult to perceive. Perhaps the anthology’s greatest drawback is its familiarity—its predictability in format, in content, and in organization. Instructors, students, and publishers alike expect that certain pedagogical features, certain reading selections, and certain conventions of arrangement and design will be present. As a result, the differences between anthologies have become increasingly difficult to discern, and editors have found it more and more difficult to make substantive changes. In fact, large sections of the traditional anthology have become “boilerplate”—the “given” with which editors begin work—and little space is left for variation, modification, or innovation.

With the strengths and weaknesses of the traditional introduction to literature anthology in mind, we set out to write *Literature: Reading, Reacting, Writing*. Over twenty years of teaching has given us a good sense of what our students deserve and what our field demands. Using this knowledge, we made a “wish list” for our ideal text. We wanted to include a significant number of established favorites—those readings recognized by instructors as valuable. Many students and teachers like and expect to see these works, and their familiarity makes them good starting points for introducing students to literature. We also believed that we had to do more than include the already “approved” readings—and, in fact, do more than supplement the approved list with a few token voices representing contemporary literature.

We recognize that the literary canon is rapidly expanding to include an exciting diversity of contexts, cultures, and viewpoints, and we welcome this trend as long overdue. Accordingly, we have included high-quality representatives of many of these diverse voices. As a result of our efforts, this anthology includes selections by noted writers from many regions and ethnic backgrounds in the United States, Canada, and the British Isles, as well as selections by writers from various countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In addition, we have sought to include younger writers like Lorrie Moore and Amy Tan, whose reputations are still developing, and a significant number of selections by women, minorities, and non-Western writers.

Many anthologies, eager to include such works because of their obvious merit and appeal, are nevertheless reluctant to look too different; therefore, they may include “new” works that are new only to their text, not to the canon, choosing “safe” minority or foreign writers whose works, already given the stamp of approval by the critical hierarchy, have been anthologized frequently. Alternatively, editors may limit the number of new works to a sprinkling, or even relegate “nontraditional” or “contemporary” works to separate sections of the text. Our intent has been to place such works where they belong, alongside the “classics”: to integrate new with old, familiar with unfamiliar, inviting students simultaneously to discover new works and to see familiar works in new contexts. Our goal in this anthology is not just to expand the literary canon, but also to expand students’ personal canons.

To help students gain an appreciation of the complex issues involved in expanding the traditional literary canon, we begin our text with a chapter called “Understanding Literature.” After surveying traditional literary themes, we summarize the reasons why many students of literature believe that the traditional canon needs to be revised. We then discuss the processes of interpreting and evaluating literature, placing special emphasis on how the personal experience of the reader affects meaning. Finally, we examine the role of literary criticism and consider how it can offer students perspectives that can help them to expand their literary horizons.

In addition to including diverse reading selections, we wanted our text to include more than just a token mention of the process of writing about literature. As writing teachers, and as the coauthors of five previous writing texts, we are convinced that the processes of reading and writing are

closely linked. We know that we come to discover our ideas about literature through a complex process that includes reading, rereading, questioning, and discussing as well as writing and rewriting. Writing is a kind of exploration that is different from reading and, as such, it offers different challenges as well as different rewards. Writing, like conversation, offers an opportunity to explore, refine, revise, and rethink ideas. To help students to see writing about literature as a process of testing ideas, of growing into a point of view or critical stance, and of participating in an ongoing critical debate, we include writing instruction in this text not as an afterthought, tucked unobtrusively away in an appendix or scattered in a few polished sample student papers, but in four full chapters about the writing process as it applies to literature.

In Chapter 2 we discuss concepts familiar to composition teachers and students—gathering and arranging ideas, drafting, and so on—and explain and illustrate how to apply these concepts to writing about literature. Then, within each of the text's three major sections, we narrow our focus to follow the progress of three students as they move through the process of writing about three different literary works: Alberto Alvaro Rios's story "The Secret Lion" (Chapter 3), Dona Stein's poem, "Putting Mother By" (Chapter 12), and David Henry Hwang's play *FOB* (Chapter 21). We hope that these chapters will encourage students to explore other works in this anthology, and in other sources, with confidence and creativity.

Although the student essays-in-progress do not make use of critical, historical, or biographical sources, we recognize that many literary essays, including those assigned in introductory literature courses, do. At the same time, we know that instructors may be reluctant to assign such essays because of the limitations of library facilities or because they are not certain that students will be able to evaluate or even locate useful sources on their own. Still, understanding how important it is for students to develop critical thinking skills—to be exposed to diverse ideas about a work, to see them as part of a stimulating debate about that work, to make judgments about the validity and relevance of various ideas and approaches, and to formulate critical positions of their own—we have assembled three separate Casebooks, one each for fiction, poetry, and drama. In these three Casebooks we include articles by literary critics as well as complementary biographical and critical material from a variety of sources—newspaper articles and interviews, for example. The Casebooks are designed to supplement students' reading of Joyce Carol Oates's story "Where Are You Going, Where Have You Been?", of a selection of poems by Gwendolyn Brooks, and of Athol Fugard's play "*Master Harold*" . . . and the Boys. We believe that students and instructors will find these collections of materials stimulating as well as convenient. The result, we hope, will be that students will write thoughtful critical essays on works by the writers represented—and, eventually, on other writers as well.

Other features in this anthology are designed to enhance and strengthen the text's emphasis on reading and writing about a wide variety of literary works from a wide variety of perspectives. A glossary of literary terms, with

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