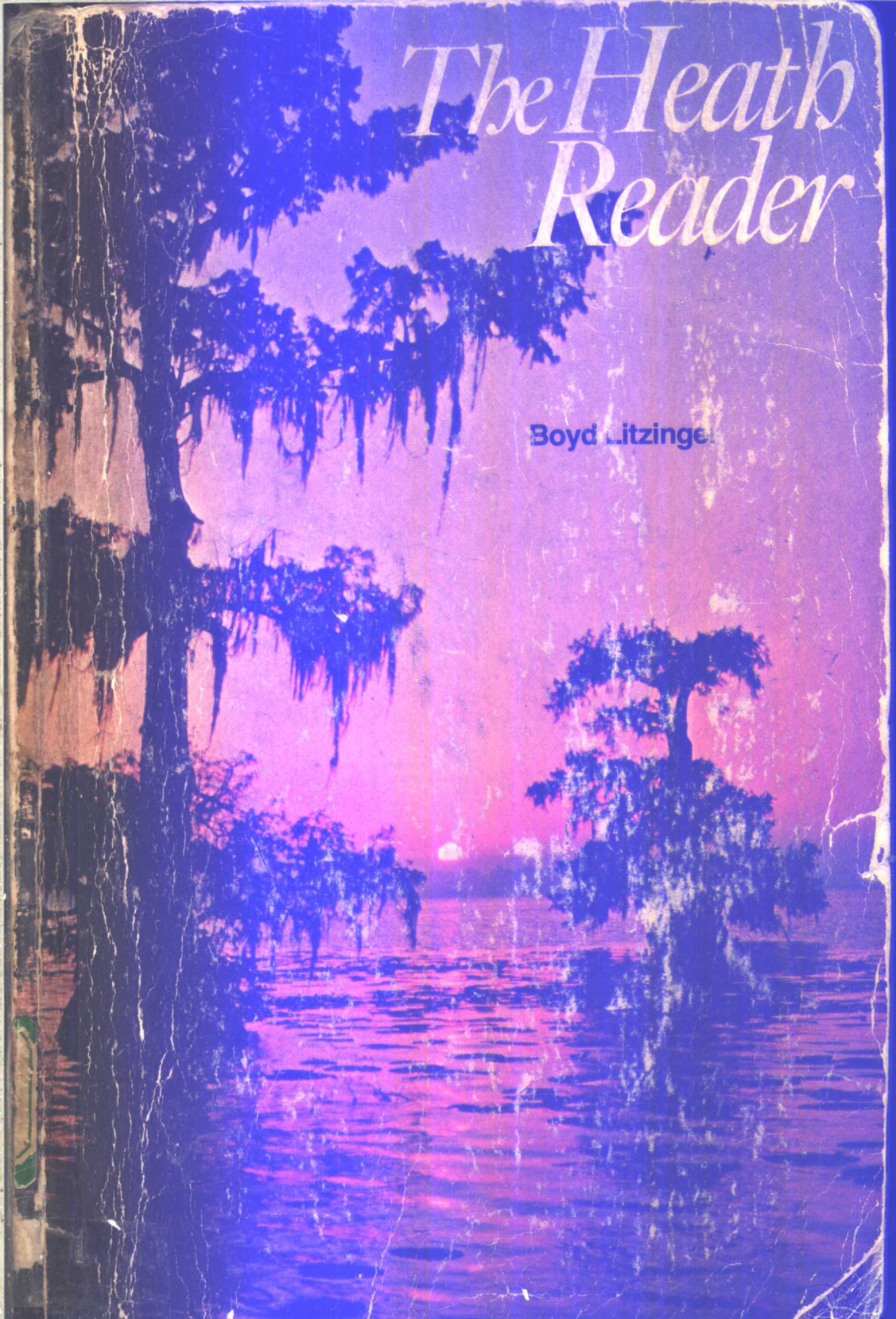
The Heath Reader



Boyd Litzinger

The Heath Reader

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Preface

Teaching freshmen to write is a challenging and satisfying job. The mechanical work—marking, grading, and the like—is more demanding and time-consuming than many nonteachers dream. But the satisfactions are also great. Young people are particularly open to new ideas when they start college, and there are few subjects in which their growth can be seen so clearly as in the first composition course they take. Entering freshmen are predisposed to learn, and correct writing is a skill that can be taught. This book is meant to make their job of learning, and yours of teaching, a little easier.

Three principles, tested in nearly thirty years of teaching freshmen, went into the making of this book. The first is that students in an English composition course need regularly assigned readings to supplement their work in grammar or rhetoric textbooks. I have found that the week-in, week-out assignment and class discussion of grammar or rhetorical modes unsupported by a good reader can become an exercise worthy of Mr. Gradgrind. Not that students should not be taught the principles of induction or proper use of analogies; certainly, students need these tools of good thinking and good writing. But they are *tools*, and the student must learn their use. "Write a persuasive paper using inductive logic," the students are told. "On what?" they ask—and very properly. *The Heath Reader* is meant to help provide the "what." It is, first of all, designed to be a source of ideas for students—a means of stimulating their minds and memories, of unlocking their own imaginations.

For this reason, I have chosen a great many readings, some quite short, rather than twenty or thirty very long essays. The variety of sources is deliberately wide, intentionally eclectic, in style as well as content, so as to increase the opportunities for catching the student's interest. Victor Hugo's bombast may work upon the imagination that Graham Greene's calmness or Joan Didion's quiet grace failed to move. A well-selected book of readings also supplies models of form as well as ideas for writing. To talk about comparison and contrast is one thing, to illustrate effectively in the lecture room another; but to give examples of the principles in action is an excellent reinforcement.

A second principle has been to set before the student a high proportion of selections from writers of permanent interest. This does not mean that only the

classics of *belles lettres* are here included. I have ranged through many discipline for examples of articulate men and women expressing significant ideas in gooc language. Ours is a living language, and I subscribe to Bertrand Russell's definitio of correct English as "the habits of speech of educated people." Evelyn Waugl Joseph Wood Krutch, and Mary McCarthy, yes; but also James Jeans, M Twain, and Annie Dillard. The scientists, the journalists, and the historian provide a rich and varied fare.

The third principle has been to appeal frankly to the interests of those w teach this material. No one wants to turn the course in prose composition i exercise in literary explication, but I think that teachers will work more effec with material they can respect and admire than with the quotidian results of ye day's irrelevancies. A textbook ought not to be deliberately dull. I must also a considering the current make-up of college curricula, that the freshman reader m offer one of the very few chances some college students will have to meet the classic in a formal course and to discover that there is much to be gained from reading writers like Booker T. Washington and James Fenimore Cooper. Surely, no one could be the worse for having been exposed to ideas in the form of a poem by John Keats or a short story by Kate Chopin.

As to organization, this reader is divided into four sections—Exposition, Description, Narration, and Persuasion. Composing these larger sections are the several chapters, *each one centered on a single "idea" and each illustrating a single rhetorical mode.* Within a given chapter, I have followed, but not slavishly, a pattern: the first selections are usually brief and provide a relatively uncluttered example of the rhetorical method; subsequent selections tend to be longer and to illustrate the rhetorical method as it is ordinarily used, that is, combined with other devices authors employ to make a point. For example, Chapter 3, "The Eye of the Traveler," centers on comparison and contrast. The chapter opens with James A. Michener's brief comparison of Spain with Portugal, but the final entry shows Mark Twain using comparison and contrast as one of a number of techniques in "Rome and St. Peter's Overwhelm Us." Enough examples are given so that an instructor has considerable freedom of choice.

I have tried to keep the editorial apparatus to a useful minimum. There are introductions to each large section and to each chapter, but these are necessarily general: this book is not meant to replace, but to supplement, the basic text for a composition course. Brief headnotes identify the author and, where necessary, establish a context for the reading. Individual selections are ordinarily followed by a list of key or difficult words the student may need to look up, questions meant to shed light on form and content (usually in that order), and topics for writing. Starting from the premise that students must take an active part in their own education, I have provided this apparatus to help them, not to do their thinking for them, to overwhelm them with information, or to supply them with facts that they can get from the context of the selection or from a dictionary. An appendix offers some elementary instruction in writing the 500-word essay, with suggestions students may find helpful in handling other assignments in writing.

And improved student writing is, after all, the goal of English instructors

verywhere. I hope that you will find this book to be of some help towards that goal, source of ideas and examples upon which your students can draw.

In "The Two Races of Men," Charles Lamb divided the entire human race to two parts, borrowers and lenders. Editors of freshman readers are more closely ied to the former than to the latter. As a result, they owe much to many, a fact I y to admit. I have sought advice and ideas in many quarters and have upon the experience of my own teachers and students; I have profited even particular suggestions have had to be forgone. Those who have helped e my colleagues here at Saint Bonaventure University and elsewhere, most of experienced teachers of composition but others specialists in areas as diverse as gy and business, chemistry and children's literature; teaching assistants and duate students; authors, editors, publishers, business executives, and family embers—all of them, I trust, friends.

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Finally, I must acknowledge family obligations. My wife, Toni, has provided the patience which made work on *The Heath Reader* possible. By attending college simultaneously, my children, Michael and Gretchen, have made it almost necessary. I dedicate this book to the three of them.

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