Literacies

Reading, Writing, Interpretation

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LITERACIES

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LITERACIES

READING, WRITING, INTERPRETATION

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PREFACE

As the editors of this book, we look at reading and writing as conversational processes. People "listen" to what texts say, discuss with other readers the meanings they find, and "talk back" to those texts by writing (and revising) their responses to the ideas they encounter. The readings we chose for *Literacies* represent many different ways of interpreting experience and the world. As you look through these pages, you will find the research of anthropologists next to short stories about family life, or a philosopher's theories about gender next to an essay that explores the social connection between words and diseases. The writers in this book speak different specialized languages, but by tracing the terms and ideas that are important to each reading, applying these ideas to new texts and contexts, and considering what these concepts say about the lives we live, active readers can make these texts "speak" to each other in illuminating, sometimes startling ways. The study questions, assignments, and invitations to write give students and teachers some of the tools they need to begin thinking about their own "literacies" in new and empowering ways.

Appropriately, this book is itself the result of many ongoing conversations: among ourselves (often over hundreds of miles), with other teachers, and, perhaps most importantly, with the countless students who have read these texts with us and shared, both in class discussions and in writ-

ing, their diverse, always growing interpretations. Like the rest of us, our students bring their experiences and commitments with them when they read and write. We believe this book offers strategies to help students put the lives they have led in the service of making new knowledge—academic, personal, and social. We have much to learn from what they say and write.

The four of us originally developed *Literacies* while we were all teaching in the Rutgers University Writing Program. As members of one of the Writing Program's textbook committees, we needed to replace a text which did not sufficiently challenge students to develop meaningful reading, writing, and interpretive skills. When we could not find the kind of book we sought, we began to construct such a book ourselves. We owe a particular debt to Ken Smith, whose reputation for sound pedagogical judgment lent weight to the project in the days before many teachers and program administrators had had a chance to judge *Literacies* for themselves. While he was a course coordinator and a writing program associate director at Rutgers, Ken maintained close communication with the Rutgers Writing Program administration, successfully articulating at all stages our shared vision of the ways in which the new textbook would enhance writing instruction for Rutgers students. Since that first edition, a second and revised edition of *Literacies* has been used, not only at Rutgers but in different institutional settings and in different parts of the United States.

We have many friends in the Rutgers University Writing Program whom we wish to thank: Carol Allen, Hugh English, Nancy Glazer, Katie Hogan, Priti Joshi, April Lidinsky, Ann Rea, Laura Sebastian-Coleman, Dawn Skorczewski, Susan Welsh, Mike Williamson, and Matthew Wilson are only some of the people whose feedback and encouragement have contributed to the project. We especially wish to thank Kurt Spellmeyer, our partner in many formative conversations about reading, writing, and pedagogy.

During her time at Rutgers, Marilyn Rye raised issues about reading and writing that we have tried to build upon in this book. We have adapted the flexible and dynamic Invitations to Write that Lou Kelly developed at the University of Iowa and wish to thank her for giving us permission to introduce them in this new context. Carl Klaus gave us helpful advice when we needed it. Our reviewers—including Nancy Barry, Luther College; Alexander Friedlander, Drexel University; Thomas Miller, University of Arizona; and Linda H. Peterson, Yale University—kept us aware of the needs of teachers and students working in a variety of writing settings. We appreciate their thoughtful honesty. Finally, we

wish to thank Libby Miles for her work on the biographical sketches and our friends at Norton: Allen Clawson, for his efforts in bringing Norton and *Literacies* together; Marian Johnson, for her skilled manuscript editing; Kate Lovelady, for her work on permissions; Diane O'Connor, for attending to production; and Carol Hollar-Zwick, our editor, for her ability to keep our conversations focused while still hearing and responding to the productive differences among our ideas about the project.

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INTRODUCTION

READING, RATIFICATION, AND RISK

You take a chance when you read. You risk an encounter with another person's ideas and experiences, and you may not be the same when you are finished. Paying close attention to someone's words is an act of respect and a form of inquiry, a way of taking the world seriously. When you think about the ways a writer's words relate to what you know of the world, you take your own ideas and experiences seriously too. There is no telling where that inquiry might lead and whose ideas might be challenged in the process. Everything is up for grabs, then, when you think about what you read, and that is the power, and the risk, of the encounter. Reading like that can change a person.

As you read the first paragraph, you may have questioned what we said, and rightly so. You may have thought of other kinds of reading you know well—reading a novel for pleasure, for example, enjoying the suspense and the lively characters, or reading a magazine or nonfiction book to learn something new about a favorite pastime, or reading a manual to learn how to make a useful repair. There are many reasons for reading and as many ways to read, and you undoubtedly have made several of them a regular part of your life. Since this is a textbook, and you have probably been assigned to read it, you may have read that first paragraph

in yet another way. How, you might ask yourself now, are you accustomed to reading textbooks? If your experience is like ours, you may feel that schools have sometimes taught you to accept textbooks as storehouses of approved and authoritative information, neatly arranged and ready to be learned. As textbook writers, we invite you to read this textbook much differently than that. Read *Literacies* as openly and contentiously as you can.

If you used your reading experience to challenge what we said in the first paragraph, then you were reading our words for something other than authoritative information. Instead, you may have started to ask yourself what relations you could find between another person's understanding, presented in the paragraph, and your own. If so, then you were beginning to explain and explore and evaluate one body of ideas and experience—ours—in light of another—yours. Whenever you take that step as a reader, you prepare yourself to become a more powerful thinker, a person who can shape new insights from an encounter with someone else's perspective. This book is about becoming that kind of reader—and making that kind of reading work for you as a writer.

Along the way to those goals, even readers who scrutinize rather than faithfully accept a textbook's authority face another barrier. We are thinking now of a trait of human psychology that Dean Barnlund, a writer in *Literacies*, describes in his essay "Communication in a Global Village." Barnlund mentions "how powerfully human beings are drawn to those who hold the same beliefs and how sharply they are repelled by those who do not." Although Barnlund talks generally about communication in his essay, we can apply his idea to the act of reading. He says that this common psychological trait "converts many human encounters into rituals of ratification, [with] each person looking to the other only to obtain endorsement and applause for his own beliefs." Some people read this way all the time. They seek out books and articles that support their opinions, or they look into a text only until they know where the writer "stands" on an issue. There is no true inquiry, no risk of encounter, in those reading practices. If we approach reading as a "ritual of ratification," an opportunity for "endorsement and applause," where we want the writer to confirm what we already believe, then our wish will probably come true. When we read to ratify, our ideas will remain unchanged.

Yet good readers probably begin, more often than not, with something like ratification. As people read, they may find it much easier to recognize something they share with a writer than to sort out their differences. As members of a community, for example, as citizens, readers may

want to affirm shared values, for the sake of stability or solidarity, for the sake of continuity and an orderly life. Furthermore, if you have ever been persuaded temporarily by a powerful argument, or if you have ever "lost yourself in a book," you probably know that good readers, even when they resist ratification, still have to read a text closely and openly enough to risk being swayed by what it says, as Robert Scholes, another *Literacies* writer, points out. But good readers, he believes, do not stop there. Having submitted for a while to someone else's meanings in a text, they step back, reconsider from their own perspective, and find ways to evaluate based on what they bring to the reading and what they know of the world. After having temporarily "surrendered," good readers use their critical skills to "recover" their own integrity and shape their own meanings, Scholes says, which may now be broader and more powerful because they will incorporate elements of both persons' perspectives. In that way, readers who inquire and establish connections between what they know and what they read create an opportunity for a new understanding of themselves and others. Good readers abandon the safety of ratification and risk an encounter with another person's ideas and experiences in exchange for the opportunities of new thinking and growth. This back-and-forth process, with its exchange of meanings and its possibilities for new ones, is interpretation. Let's look at a detailed example of the process.

THE VILLAGERS AND THE ANTHROPOLOGIST

You may wonder how serious we are when we invite you to challenge what you read in this book. Many of the writers in *Literacies* are experts in their particular fields, and students of ours have sometimes asked whether they really have the authority to question what the experts have written. But many of the readings in this book show how important it is for individuals to reflect on, and when necessary, challenge the beliefs of others. You may know from your own experience the difference such an act can sometimes make for a person or for a wider group or community. One writer in particular, Nancy Scheper-Hughes, shows how even the seemingly unequal exchange between an expert anthropologist and the people she studies can teach both sides something they hadn't expected when they truly risk an encounter with the other's ideas and experiences. In fact, experts in several fields like anthropology have drawn on the views of outsiders in recent years to refresh their thinking about how societies work. In an exchange of ideas, locating an outsider's point of view can sometimes provoke a breakthrough.

As valuable as it is, this can be very challenging or even disturbing, as Scheper-Hughes shows in her essay "The Anthropological Looking Glass." Scheper-Hughes points out that anthropologists' books are ordinarily "shielded" from responses by nonexperts, especially responses by the people they study and write about. Often anthropologists haven't written in the language spoken by the people they study, so their subjects haven't been able to dispute or even add to what the anthropologists say about their society. Accustomed to having their authority shielded in this way, anthropologists can find it "most unsettling" when their subjects do speak back, as in the case of Scheper-Hughes's own research in a village in western Ireland. After living in and studying the village of Ballybran for a year, Scheper-Hughes wrote a book called *Saints, Scholars, and Schizophrenics.* In her book she argued that the whole region around Ballybran was sinking slowly under the weight of stifling social customs that cause mental illness in an alarming number of the inhabitants. When the book was published in 1979, many villagers read it avidly, saw how their way of life was portrayed, and came to their own angry conclusions about the book's value and truthfulness. They disputed the book, though quietly, in their customary ways. More importantly, perhaps, they used the book. One man was so pleased to see some of his witty sayings quoted there that he memorized them so he could say them again—a very curious example of ratification, perhaps. One group began to examine the difficult social problems the book revealed, and one woman reported that she and her friend were able to discuss common problems as they never could before. "A great burden has been lifted," that villager said.

All of this new thinking was made possible by working back and forth between Scheper-Hughes's anthropological perspective and what she calls the "common sense world" of the village. As the village readers considered these two perspectives, their ideas about their own lives came up for fresh thought and discussion—that is, for the benefits and risks of revision. Spurred on by the outsider's view of their society, some of the villagers made an inquiry and started to undo the limits of ratification. As they reconsidered their common-sense world, they composed a new understanding that corresponded to their own contexts and desires and their new, wider perspective. By reading the anthropology text, the villagers were able to read their experience again, freshly. When they encountered this outsider's voice, written in an unfamiliar, specialized language, they discovered that they had to examine their own lives in order to read the anthropology. They discovered that experience can be read—that is, reinterpreted rather than merely ratified—just as a book can be. They also

had a chance to discover one of the important aspects of *Literacies*—the opportunities for revision that are created when we bring different social voices together. If the villagers of Ballybran came to see reading as a risky chance for crossing boundaries, as a valuable chance for revision, then they made the experience of reading part of their own process of change and growth. They also proved something very important: when mere ratification stops, the authority to interpret can belong to anyone—villagers, college students, anthropologists—who dares to use it.

That last statement helps to explain one more trait of the villagers' encounter with Scheper-Hughes. In her essay, she reflects on the angry reception her book met in Ballybran. She reports that some of her friends and acquaintances were wounded by her portrayal of their village life and her assessment of its weaknesses and broke off their friendships with her. Some strongly questioned her right to publish their private ways to the world. Through their replies to her book, she began to reconsider the purposes and methods of anthropology. She asked herself what she hoped to accomplish by writing an account that was critical of its subject's ways. Even though the villagers would seem to have no right to question the expert on her field of expertise, question her they did, and she found herself startled by their inquiries. As she reflected on their views of anthropology in general and on her work in particular, she began to revise her understanding of her field's ethical obligations to the people being studied. By challenging the anthropologist and perhaps even changing her, the villagers of Ballybran started to change the field of anthropology.

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We have kept in mind the interpretive encounter between Nancy Scheper-Hughes and the people of Ballybran as we have written and revised the materials for this book. Our title, *Literacies*, introduces some of the opportunities you may encounter as you write your essays. We chose this name to acknowledge the many types of essays and stories in these pages, the many kinds of specialist writers represented here, and the specialized kinds of language and knowledge used to compose these readings. In the late twentieth century, it is not possible to assume that there is one general sort of literacy that suits all experiences, all audiences, and all occasions. Our society is made up of many social voices, many kinds of expertise, many contexts and languages, and we believe that a reading anthology that includes many of those voices offers a more realistic sense of the complex lives we are all leading. Furthermore, our world

of contesting social voices offers special opportunities for a person to go beyond ratification to shape her own meanings. Each person can try out some of the ways of interpreting used by these different social voices—learning from any of them, rather than ratifying one of them. Your course's sequence of writing assignments will ask you to explore those possibilities throughout the semester, working through a variety of perspectives as you write and revise, just as the people of Ballybran and their visiting anthropologist did.

This book invites you to be a reader and writer who questions boundaries, who uses the knowledge and the literacies you already possess to grapple with other literacies, who dares to speak within and across academic fields and areas of experience, and who composes essays that go beyond ratification. In order to do that, you will need to study what it means to bring another person's language into a conversation with your own. This means much more than quoting an author to "back up" or "prove" your point—we recognize that as ratification. While you might hear someone refer to the conversational writing process as "quoting" (since it does involve placing someone else's words in quotation marks in your paper), "quoting" itself is not an adequate explanation of the process of bringing together literacies that are strangers to each other. When you turn to the readings in *Literacies*, you will find many voices to work with, and at first they might be very strange in each other's company. But that strangeness is your chance to see your subject freshly, just as it was for Nancy Scheper-Hughes's friends and acquaintances in the Irish village and for Scheper-Hughes herself. These diverse literacies have the power to make things visible in a new way. Use that power as a partner in your work this semester. As you read, as you participate in class discussions, and as you write your drafts and revisions, bring these voices into the conversation. Let their words, their terms, their phrases and sentences, and their ideas and experiences aid and influence you as you revise your ideas. Make the specific language of another person part of the back-and-forth process of interpretation. Readers and writers who know how to do that can find ways to develop their ideas almost anywhere. They take advantage of the diversity we find in a world of competing literacies.

RESOURCES OF THE BOOK

The forty-three writers in *Literacies* represent a wide range of academic disciplines, kinds of writing, and bodies of cultural experience. We chose them not just for their variety but also because of the ways they approach

writing and interpretation. In their essays, short stories, letters, and interviews, these writers consider diverse perspectives and think critically with the help of distinctive tools of analysis that they have found useful in their diverse contexts. In doing so, they provide us with a set of critical tools—special concepts or terms for thinking about the meaning of experiences and the work of academic disciplines. As active readers, you and the other members of your class can use those tools this semester. These texts are not provided for you to ratify, but to use both in your writing class discussions and in the essays that you will go on to write.

READING QUESTIONS

Each of the readings is accompanied by four sets of questions designed to help with the back-and-forth work of interpretation. The Before Reading questions build on the knowledge that you, as a reader, bring to new texts; they are meant to help you connect your knowledge to what the text says. Because this knowledge is often quite diverse, the Before Reading questions may invite you to explore such things as common experiences, preconceptions about a subject, important terms, or historical background. For example, before you read "Chosen People," Stuart Ewen's history of the consumer in American life, we invite you to reflect on times when you have cared about the image you present to others. Ewen puzzles over the love Americans have for presenting certain images of themselves, so your insights may help you to evaluate his theory. We also ask your thoughts about the terms "consumer" and "middle class"—two terms that are vital to Ewen's discussion. Finally, we ask you to discuss some ways of reacting to a piece of advertising, a question Ewen also addresses in his essay. In all of these cases, you don't have to wait for Ewen to speak. Even before you have heard his theory, you can activate some of your relevant knowledge and experience; you can speak and write, first. Then, when you read Ewen's essay, you can see how he addresses, perhaps even responds to, your ideas about the subject. And having prepared some of your own ideas and experiences ahead of time, you will be less tempted merely to ratify the words of the expert. You will be ready to make reading into more of a dialogue between you and the writer.

Each *Literacies* text is followed by three other kinds of questions: Active Reading, Reading in New Contexts, and Draft One / Draft Two questions. Because we've tried to choose dynamic readings, the essays in this book invite active reading. The writers all share a commitment to

seeing their topics from more than one perspective, rather than dictating a dogmatic monologue about them. In the readings, something develops, something changes contexts, something is looked at in light of new terms, fresh examples, different perspectives. When you read with that dynamic quality in mind, you can trace those new terms, examples, perspectives within each text, and when you find them you can begin to deepen your understanding of the writer's thinking. Instead of discovering a single main idea, for example, you may see a series of linked ideas that rely on each other and on important examples to complete a line of thought, and you may need to return to several points in the text and examine what has been brought up there, what has changed, what is new. The Active Reading questions point out some ways to begin that task. After Shirley Brice Heath's study of the literacy practices of a small, isolated community called Trackton, for example, one of the Active Reading questions asks you to compare the ways the community trains children for reading and writing in Trackton and the ways the training prepares children for new situations outside of the community. By looking at their literacy skills in two contexts, then, you have a chance to understand something new—about literacy? about Trackton? about poverty or isolation?—that would be harder to pin down without the difference in perspective. Because all of the writers in *Literacies* use varying examples, terms, contexts, and perspectives to give richness to their thinking and writing, you can practice the same kinds of analysis as you read each selection.

Reading in New Contexts questions invite you to continue the process of active reading by applying a text's special concepts or terms to another *Literacies* reading. Good readers practice this trait almost automatically—perhaps you already pick up the ways of talking and thinking you encounter and try out new ideas in other contexts. The Reading in New Contexts questions ask you to practice this process. We select one or more terms or ideas for each question and suggest a context in which to apply them. In "The Social Power of Expert Healers," for example, Howard Brody creates three terms for looking at the imbalance of power between physicians and patients. If you work with his definitions of these terms—owned power, aimed power, and shared power—and you apply them to other unequal social relationships, you will clarify his meaning and prepare yourself to evaluate the terms as ideas. If you can confidently apply and evaluate ideas and terms in new contexts by the end of the semester, you will have accomplished something very important in your writing course.

Draft One / Draft Two questions ask you to practice all of the inter-

pretive skills contained in the other sets of questions while working through a process of rethinking and revision. Whether these questions call directly on personal experience or not, all of the Draft One / Draft Two sets ask you to work with more than one perspective as you write and revise. Draft One questions introduce a problem or topic and suggest some ways of shaping a response, while Draft Two questions introduce a different perspective into the discussion and call for a revision of your first response in light of that new perspective. Together, these questions invite you to compose an essay that uses multiple perspectives much the way many *Literacies* readings do. You will need to work on these paired questions over several days or even a couple of weeks in order to have time to read and reread the texts, to reflect on your prior knowledge of the topics, and to work back and forth between the different perspectives you encounter as you write and revise. One of the sets of questions following Victor Seidler's essay is typical: The Draft One question works with Seidler's idea that our society's ways of defining men's social roles are damaging to men, asking you to evaluate that idea in light of your own experience. To complete the Draft Two question, you will need to extend and revise your work by incorporating the men's experiences described in another *Literacies* reading. By the time you complete the project, you will have evaluated Seidler's idea from at least two perspectives, in successive drafts, which means you will be in a good position to explain your judgment of its merit.

INVITATIONS TO WRITE

The Invitations to Write come in two varieties. The first set of Invitations addresses common aspects of reading, writing, and revising, and invites you to describe and make decisions about the way you approach assignments. These Invitations suggest ways to be more strategic about how you shape interpretations or revise them for an audience. The second set addresses error in grammar, punctuation, and spelling. These Invitations introduce a more systematic approach to error than you might already be using. Since most writers make a few mistakes repeatedly, with some guidance they can compile a personal handbook of their most common error patterns and use the handbook to search out those patterns, spot those errors, and fix them. In time, writers who take a systematic approach to their own patterns of error can hand in papers that are free of anything that will distract a reader from the ideas they contain.

Both sets of Invitations are opportunities for you to write informally

about your interpretive and composing practices and to reflect how your practices are serving you now. Taken in that spirit, they create occasions for you to consider how to make the most of your writing course.

ASSIGNMENT SEQUENCES

Following the readings, you will find a collection of sequenced writing assignments, or sequences, designed to offer opportunities for extended intellectual projects. While most Draft One / Draft Two questions invite you to draft and revise with two or three perspectives in mind, in a sequence you will stay with a topic for several weeks, encountering three or more readings and a variety of perspectives, concepts, and bodies of experience which you will use in a series of class discussions and essays. Whether your teacher selects one or two of the twelve sequences in *Literacies* or provides others, you will find that there is a great advantage to staying with a topic for several reading and writing assignments. You have a lengthy opportunity to reread, resee, and comprehend ideas as you apply them in new contexts. Extended work with a set of ideas resembles the work you will be doing in your academic major and in your career, so the interpretive challenges you face in the sequences have a special realistic value.

MLA AND APA CITATIONS AND BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES

Literacies includes a brief guide to MLA and APA citation. Refer to this guide for the basic requirements for giving credit when you quote, paraphrase, or draw information from a source, including the readings in this book. If you use the guide to make accurate citations for the passages you quote from *Literacies*, you will become accustomed to one of these two styles of citation and will be prepared to use a fuller version when you write longer research essays for other courses. While composing citations is the most mechanical aspect of learning to quote from sources, it is an important tool for making other readers and writers your partners as you develop ideas. When you quote, you point to something meaningful; when you discuss what you quote, you involve yourself with the ideas and experiences of others and explore the relations you find there. When your teacher or classmates respond to a draft you have written, they will be better able to involve themselves in your thinking and give useful feedback if they can refer to the passages from which you have taken your quotations. In your writing class, as in other academic and professional