



75

READINGS

P . L . U . S

SANTI BUSCEMI  
CHARLOTTE SMITH

# 75 READINGS PLUS

THIRD EDITION

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Middlesex County College

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Adirondack Community College

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## 75 READINGS PLUS

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# ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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# TO THE INSTRUCTOR

*75 Readings Plus* is an expanded version of *75 Readings*, the popular and inexpensive collection of essays for freshman composition, first published in 1987 and now in its fifth edition. Tables of contents for the two texts are identical, but the presentation of instructional materials differs.

Questions for discussion, suggestions for writing, and other instructional apparatus for *75 Readings* are presented in a manual from which teachers may copy materials for students as needed. In *75 Readings Plus*, on the other hand, instructional materials appear in the text. Accompanying each selection are an author biography, a set of discussion questions on content and strategy, and at least two suggestions for sustained writing. In addition, to help instructors exploit the connection between reading, writing, and critical thinking, *75 Readings Plus* again offers a set of prompts for short writing inspired by each essay selection. These prompts can also be used as journal assignments or as warm-up exercises for projects such as those described in *Suggestions for Sustained Writing*. In some cases, they can even be expanded into assignments for complete essays.

The table of contents of the third edition of *75 Readings Plus* differs greatly from that of the second edition. Seventeen new essays appear in the third. Once again, special attention has been paid to the chapter on argument. Selections by Lawrence, Hentoff, and Hardin have been added to an already strong group of essays to make the chapter an exciting vehicle for teaching critical thinking and persuasion. Like all the other new selections in this edition, they have been field-tested and have consistently provoked interesting class discussion and raised questions that students have wanted to address in writing.

In other chapters, additions such as those by Steel and Walker on the relationship between the races, by Steinem and Tannen on the relationship between the sexes, and by Dershowitz and Whitehead on two important contemporary issues—the rights of the individual and the role of the family—inspire a variety of responses and encourage students to learn more about such important subjects. Selections by Simeti, Pickering, Noda, and Gruchow explore important ethnic and cultural considerations that students have found personally relevant and that inspire well-developed and incisive writing.

Essays by Dabney, Dillard, and Bloom as well as those by Pickering, Gruchow, and Walker help illustrate the importance of voice even in formal writing. Such essays and many other selections in the third edition can contribute much to a syllabus aimed at empowering students, for they inspire beginning writers to find their own distinctive voices. And speaking of distinctive voices, Leacock's "How to Live to Be 200" when studied with essays by Pickering, Dorothy Parker, and Britt can be used to illustrate the appropriateness, the difficulty, and the rewards of using humor effectively in sophisticated writing.

Special thanks are due to the following instructors who reviewed the anthology and gave us their suggestions for the third edition: Dixie Bierstrom, Iowa State University; Linda Buckman, San Jacinto College; John Case, Southern Vermont College; Patricia Currans-Sheehan, Briar Cliff College; Mike Hogan, University of New Mexico; Chris Noordhoorn, Oakland Community College; Rob Perrin, Indiana State University; Frank Salvidio, Westfield State College; and Sherry Zively, University of Houston.

We are grateful for the comments of colleagues who have used *75 Readings* and *75 Readings Plus* over the last six years. We welcome their ongoing contributions as we continue to improve these texts and make them more responsive to the needs of students. We also thank Laura Lynch and Tim Julet, our good friends at McGraw-Hill, who encouraged and helped us continue this project.

*Santi Buscemi*  
*Charlotte Smith*

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# 1

## Narration

One of the things that defines us as human is the universal desire and ability to create narrative. “Tell me a story,” the child implores; and we willingly oblige by reciting an old favorite passed down through the generations or by making up one of our own.

We are naturally curious creatures, wanting to know what happened, when, and to whom—even if none of it is true. Perhaps that is why we feel compelled to create mythologies on one hand and to report the news or write history on the other.

Some narratives contain long evocative descriptions of setting. Others present fascinating characters whose predicaments rivet our attention or whose lives mirror our own. Still others seem more like plays, heavy with dialogue by which writers allow their characters to reveal themselves. Whatever combination of techniques authors use, all stories—from the briefest anecdotes to the longest novels—have a plot. They recount events in a more or less chronological order. They reveal what happened, and, in most cases, allow readers or listeners to draw their own conclusions about the significance of those events.

This is perhaps the chief difference between what you will read in Chapter 1 and essays in other parts of this text. While some types of writing are aimed at explaining or persuading, narration dramatizes important human concerns by presenting events that, when taken together, create a world the author wants the reader to share.

Moving from beginning to end by order of time, narration generally relies on a more natural pattern of organization than other types of writing, but it is no less sophisticated or powerful a tool for explaining complex ideas or for changing readers’ opinions than, say, analogy, classification, or formal argument. All story tellers, no matter how entertaining their tales, have something to say about human beings and the world they inhabit. If you have already read selections from the chapters that follow, you know that writers often couple narration with other techniques to develop ideas and support opinions which otherwise might have remained abstract, unclear, or unconvincing. A good story

may reveal more than just physical description about a person or a place, and it can sometimes help readers understand an important problem or issue beyond our most valiant attempts to explain it “logically.”

The point is that writers of narrative are not compelled to underscore the connection between the events in a story and the point it makes. Readers can find their own “theses.”

Many of the essays you will read in this chapter are autobiographical: Maya Angelou, Langston Hughes, and Virginia Bell Dabney show how they confronted difficult situations and, in the process, achieved significant insight into themselves, their families, and the human character. The writing of essays like theirs often results from a profound compulsion to find meaning in what once seemed devoid of it, a process that may define the act of narration itself.

The selections by George Orwell and Maxine Hong Kingston might be placed in another category. They point beyond themselves to social and political issues that are universal and perennial. Something similar can be said of Annie Dillard’s essay on stunt flying, which uses narrative as the vehicle for a philosophical discourse on art, freedom, and the “boundaries of the humanly possible.” Finally, although Olive Schreiner writes in an intensely personal voice, she too reminds us that “nothing in the Universe is quite alone.”

However the pieces in this chapter seem to be related—and you will surely find connections of your own to talk about—remember that each has been included because it has a poignant story to tell. Read each selection carefully, and learn what you can about the techniques of narration. Here’s hoping that at least a few will inspire you to narrate a personal vision of the world that will enrich both you and your readers.



---

# A Hanging

## George Orwell

*George Orwell is the pseudonym of Eric Blair (1903–1950). Born in India, where his father served in the British colonial government, Orwell was educated at Eton. As a young man, he served as a British policeman in Burma, the setting for this selection. Later, he was wounded while fighting for the loyalists in the Spanish Civil War, about which he wrote in Homage to Catalonia. Orwell despised the “Big Brother” mentalities of both the fascists and the communists, who backed opposing sides in that war. However, he also condemned the crass bureaucracy of the democratic governments of his time. In short, Orwell became an enemy of politics and politicians in general. He is remembered for Animal Farm (1946) and 1984 (1949), classics of political satire, and for his many essays.*

It was in Burma, a sodden morning of the rains. A sickly light, like yellow 1  
tinfoil, was slanting over the high walls into the jail yard. We were waiting outside the condemned cells, a row of sheds fronted with double bars, like small animal cages. Each cell measured about ten feet by ten and was quite bare within except for a plank bed and a pot of drinking water. In some of them brown silent men were squatting at the inner bars, with their blankets draped round them. These were the condemned men, due to be hanged within the next week or two.

One prisoner had been brought out of his cell. He was a Hindu, a puny 2  
wisp of a man, with a shaven head and vague liquid eyes. He had a thick, sprouting moustache, absurdly too big for his body, rather like the moustache of a comic man in the films. Six tall Indian warders were guarding him and getting him ready for the gallows. Two of them stood by with rifles and fixed bayonets, while the others handcuffed him, passed a chain through his handcuffs and fixed it to their belts, and lashed his arms tight to his sides. They crowded very close about him, with their hands always on him in a careful, caressing grip, as though all the while feeling him to make sure he was there. It was like men handling a fish which is still alive and may jump back into the water. But he stood quite unresisting, yielding his arms limply to the ropes, as though he hardly noticed what was happening.

Eight o'clock struck and a bugle call, desolately thin in the wet air, floated 3  
from the distant barracks. The superintendent of the jail, who was standing apart from the rest of us, moodily prodding the gravel with his stick, raised his head at the sound. He was an army doctor, with a grey toothbrush moustache and a gruff voice. “For God’s sake hurry up, Francis,” he said irritably. “The man ought to have been dead by this time. Aren’t you ready yet?”

Francis, the head jailer, a fat Dravidian in a white drill suit and gold 4  
spectacles, waved his black hand. “Yes sir, yes sir,” he bubbled. “All iss satisfactory prepared. The hangman iss waiting. We shall proceed.”