

The Essay Connection

READINGS FOR WRITERS

Third Edition

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There is no limit to what you make possible."*

DONALD M. MURRAY, *Reading as a Reader* 7

"You can't write without reading."

EUDORA WELTY, *In Love with Books* 27

"I learned from the age of two or three that any room in our house, at any time of day, was there to read in, or to be read to."

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"The essayist . . . can be any sort of person, according to his mood or subject matter—philosopher, scold, jester, raconteur, confidant, pundit, devil's advocate, enthusiast."

JOHN DIDION, *Why I Write* 42

"Writing is the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying listen to me, see it my way, change your mind."

ELIE WIESEL, Why I Write: Making No Become Yes 51

"For the survivor, writing is not a profession, but an occupation, a duty. Camus calls it 'an honor.' . . . Not to transmit an experience is to betray it. . . . [I write] to help the dead vanquish death."

3. Getting Started 60

PAULE MARSHALL, The Making of a Writer 66

"For me, sitting over in the corner [of the kitchen], being seen but not heard It wasn't only what the women talked about—the content—but the way they put things—their style. The insight, irony, wit and humor they brought to their stories and discussions and their poet's inventiveness and daring with language. . . ."

PETER ELBOW, Freewriting 75

"The idea is simply to write for ten minutes. . . . Don't stop for anything. Go quickly without rushing. Never stop to look back, to cross something out. . . ."

WILLIAM LEAST HEAT MOON, A List of Nothing in Particular 80

"To say nothing is out here is incorrect; to say the desert is stingy with everything except space and light, stone and earth is closer to the truth."

Writers' Notebooks 85

MARK TWAIN, Aboard a Mississippi River Steamboat 86

"The river is so thoroughly changed that I can't bring it back to mind even when the changes have been pointed out to me. . . . Yet as unfamiliar as all the aspects have been to-day I have felt as much at home . . . as if I had never been out of the pilot house."

SYLVIA PLATH, Sylvia Plath at Seventeen 94

"I am afraid of getting older. I am afraid of getting married. Spare me from . . . the relentless cage of routine and rote. I want to be free. . . . I want . . . to be omniscient."

MAXINE KUMIN, Making Jam, Making Poetry: From a Writer's Journal 97

"This journal will not, i [sic] hope, dissect family trivia or

even worldly events, but be an underground account of the state of my mind, the state of my 'letters.' "

* Selections from Student Writers' Notebooks 106

"I read something in some book from some new author in some bookshop somewhere to the effect that writer's block is 'reading old fat novels instead of making new skinny ones.' My secret is out"

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ADRIENNE RICH, *When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision* 120

"Re-vision—the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction—is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves."

DONALD M. MURRAY, *The Maker's Eye: Revising Your Own Manuscripts* 140

"When students complete a first draft, they consider the job of writing done—and their teachers too often agree. When professional writers complete the first draft, they usually feel they are at the start of the writing process. When a draft is completed, the job of writing can begin."

LINDA PETERSON, *From Egocentric Speech to Public Discourse: Richard Wright Composes His Thoughts on Black Boy* 151

In the final draft of six revisions, Wright "keeps his audience clearly in mind, and he speaks powerfully in his own voice" to express his conviction that *Black Boy* represents the "numberless masses, past and present, who struggle for personal freedom."

JOHN TRIMBLE, *Write to be Read* 171

"Write with the assumption that your reader is a companiona-

¹ Student writings are marked by the symbol *.

ble friend with a warm sense of humor and an appreciation of simple straightforwardness. Write as if you were actually talking to that friend. . . ."

- * MARY RUFFIN, *Writer's Notebook Entries: The Evolution of "Mama's Smoke"* 178

The nine preliminary versions of this essay, freewritings, poems, and prose drafts have resulted in an elegant, poetic essay. "My mother, dead for a decade," says Ruffin, "speaks in fragments, interrupting in the middle of my own sentences."

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- SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS, *The Inheritance of Tools* 196

"A house will stand, a table will bear weight, the sides of a box will hold together, only if the joints are square and the members upright. When the bubble is lined up between two marks etched in the glass tube of a level, you have aligned yourself with the forces that hold the universe together. . . . I took pains over the wall I was building on the day my father died."

- ANNIE DILLARD, *The Death of a Moth* 206

"And then this moth-essence, this spectacular skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burning."

- FREDERICK DOUGLASS, *Resurrection* 211

"You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man."

- NANCY MAIRS, *Faith and Loving in Las Vegas* 219

"We have made a round trip, across the line and back again, and yet I know that in a way we can never come back. A line, once crossed, can never be uncrossed. We have, in trespassing, entered new moral terrain, and we will inevitably be transformed in it"

- * TIM PAYNE, *On the Beach at Bar Harbor* 231

This symbolic student essay explores the implications of the injunction, "You always have to bring home some shells from a beach . . . if there are any worth bringing."

6. Process Analysis 239

ISAAC ASIMOV, *Those Crazy Ideas* 243

To create, invent, dream up or stumble over "a new and revolutionary scientific principle," such as the theory of evolution, requires a felicitous combination of a broad education, intelligence, intuition, courage—and luck.

THOMAS S. KUHN, *The Route to Normal Science* 256

"[Paradigms] provide models from which spring particular coherent traditions of scientific research. . . . The study of paradigms . . . is what mainly prepares the student for membership in the particular scientific community with which he will later practice."

DAVID OWEN, *Beating the Test* 269

"The SAT is not the test that ETS and the College Board have always claimed it to be. It's not neutral and objective. It's not curriculum-free. It's not uncoachable. It's not the same test for everyone who takes it. It's not a measure of preparation for college."

JANE BRODY, *Exercise: A New Dietary Requirement* 278

"Exercise, not dieting, is the best route to a leaner, lighter you."

* ANN UPPERCO DOLMAN, *Learning to Drive* 292

"Greater love hath no man for his children than to teach them to drive," asserts the student author of this essay about her experiences as a novice driver.

7. Cause and Effect 299

GEORGE ORWELL, *Shooting an Elephant* 304

" . . . [W]hen the white man turns tyrant it is his own freedom that he destroys."

JONATHAN KOZOL, *The Human Cost of an Illiterate Society* 313

"So long as 60 million [illiterate] people are denied significant participation, the government is neither of, nor for, nor by, the people. It is a government, at best, of those two thirds whose wealth, skin color, or parental privilege allows them opportunity to profit from the provocation and instruction of the written word."

LEWIS THOMAS, *On Magic in Medicine* 325

"Nobody can say an unfriendly word against the sheer goodness of keeping fit, but we should go carefully with the promises."

CARL SAGAN, *The Nuclear Winter* 332

"Through generating 'an epoch of cold and dark,' a nuclear war would destroy our global civilization, and reduce the human population 'to prehistoric levels or less,' if not to extinction—a long and cold nuclear winter indeed."

* JENNIFER McBRIDE YOUNG, *The Rock Fantasy* 341

"Obviously, young people project their fantasies onto the rock star, endowing him with the powers, attractions, and beliefs that they wish to see in themselves or in those close to them."

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MARK TWAIN, *Uncle John's Farm* 354

"It was a heavenly place for a boy, that farm of my Uncle John's. . . . I can see the farm yet, with perfect clearness. I can see all its belongings, all its details. . . ."

SAMUEL HYNES, *The Feeling of Flying* 362

"Once you are really flying it is the world that tilts, not the plane; it's the horizon that tips up when you turn, and settles back when you roll out. . . . The plane remains a steady thing, a part of yourself, and you are not flying the plane—you are flying the world."

JOHN LEONARD, *The Only Child* 371

"W.I., speed kills slowly, and he fiddled too much with the oxygen flow to his brain. . . . It is odd, at my age, suddenly to have become an only child."

N. SCOTT MOMADAY, *Introduction: The Way to Rainy Mountain* 376

"The Kiowas are a summer people; they abide the cold and keep to themselves, but when the season turns and the land becomes warm and vital they cannot hold still; an old love of going returns upon them."

* KRISTIN KING BIBLER, *Ontonagon* 385

"Ontonagon was an ugly, weather-beaten town. . . . In winter the wind blew snow off the ice-chunked lake into the sealed-up town. In summer it blew smut from the pulp factory into the screen doors of the diners."

9. *Division and Classification* 391

PAUL FUSSELL, *Notes on Class* 396

Class is defined less by "income than by constraints and insecurities. . . . habits and attitudes. . . . The top three classes invariably go in for hardwoods for doors and panelling. . . . The knotty-pine 'den' is an absolute stigma of the Middle Class. . . . Below knotty pine there is plywood."

RICHARD RODRIGUEZ, *None of This Is Fair* 411

"None of this is fair. You've done some good work, but so have I. I'll bet our records are just about equal. But when we look for jobs this year, it's a different story. You get all the breaks. . . . You're a Chicano. And I am a Jew. That's the only real difference between us."

LEWIS THOMAS, *The Technology of Medicine* 418

"In fact, there are three quite different levels of technology in medicine, so unlike each other to seem altogether different undertakings."

GRETEL EHRLICH, *Rules of the Game: Rodeo* 424

"Rodeo is the wild child of ranch work and embodies some of what ranching is all about. Horsemanship—not gunslinging—was the pride of western men, and the chivalrous ethics they formulated, known as the western code, became the ground rules for every human game."

* DON AKER, *Underwear and Elevator Games* 435

"Courtesy is like clean underwear—you wear it even if nobody sees it."

10. *Illustration and Example* 444

RICHARD WRIGHT, *The Power of Books* 449

"The impulse to dream . . . surged up again and I hungered for books, new ways of looking and seeing. It was not a matter

of believing or disbelieving what I read, but of feeling something new, of being affected by something that made the look of the world different."

JOAN DIDION, *Marrying Absurd* 461

"Las Vegas is the most extreme and allegorical of American settlements, bizarre and beautiful in its venality and in its devotion to immediate gratification. . . ."

SCOTT RUSSELL SANDERS, *Under the Influence: Paying the Price of My Father's Booze* 466

"I am only trying to understand the corrosive mixture of helplessness, responsibility, and shame that I learned to feel as the son of an alcoholic."

ALICE WALKER, *Beauty: When the Other Dancer Is the Self* 482

"It was great fun being cute. But then, one day, it ended."

* LAI MAN LEE-BIRMAN, *My Bracelet* 492

Student Lee-Birman explains the symbolism of her jade bracelet, and why it is perfect "in spite of its imperfections."

11. Definition 497

NANCY MAIRS, *On Being a Cripple* 504

"I am a cripple. . . . Perhaps I want [people] to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates/gods/viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger."

MAXINE HONG KINGSTON, *On Discovery* 519

This parable provides a startling and painful definition of what it means to be a Chinese woman in a male-dominated culture.

JUDY SYFERS, *I Want a Wife* 523

"I, too, would like to have a wife. . . . My God, who wouldn't want a wife?"

SUSANNE K. LANGER, *Signs and Symbols* 527

"Language is the most amazing achievement of the symbolistic human mind. . . . Without it anything properly called 'thought' is impossible." Whereas both animals and humans respond to signs, humans alone use language, a symbol system.

* KELLY SHEA, *Acid Rain* 536

Shea explains the causes and devastating effects of acid rain, and examines possible solutions to produce cleaner air.

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BARRY LOPEZ, *My Horse* 548

"I do not own a horse. I am attached to a truck, however, and I have come to think of it in a similar way. It has no name; it never occurred to me to give it a name. It has little decoration. . . ."

BRUCE CATTON, *Grant and Lee: A Study in Contrasts* 556

"Two great Americans, Grant and Lee—very different, yet under everything very much alike."

E. B. WHITE, *Once More to the Lake* 562

"It is strange how much you can remember about places . . . once you allow your mind to return into the grooves which lead back."

ELLEN GOODMAN, *Life in a Bundle of Letters* 570

"Sometimes I think that the telephone call is as earthbound as daily dialogue, while a letter is an exchange of gifts. On the telephone you talk; in a letter you tell."

* JOAN KALYAN, *Anthony Curtis: Jazz Guitar* 574

Kalyan focuses her review of this guitar and tabla concert on the interplay between the two instruments, and between the two musicians, as well.

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"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

LEWIS H. VAN DUSEN, JR., *Civil Disobedience: Destroyer of Democracy* 610

Civil disobedience, whatever the ethical rationalization, is still an assault on our democratic society, an affront to our legal order, and an attack on our constitutional government. To indulge civil disobedience is to invite anarchy, and the permissive arbitrariness of anarchy is hardly less tolerable than the repressive arbitrariness of tyranny."

DEBORAH FALLOWS, *Why Mothers Should Stay Home* 620

"Parents seem to have some combination of self-assurance, completeness, deliberateness, and consistency [that paid helpers lack]. . . . The choice is not to be either a career woman or a dumb housewife."

GEORGE WILL, *Our Schools for Scandal* 630

The worst scandal in American colleges "involves slipping academically unqualified young men in the back doors of academic institutions, insulating them from academic expectations, wringing them dry of their athletic-commercial usefulness, then slinging them out the back door even less suited to society than they were when they entered."

* ANDREW NAKAMURA, *Pidgin to da Max* 636

"Us guys gotta pull togetta and believe in making awa world one foa English and pidgin."

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A classic assertion of the unity of a democratic nation, "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

GEORGE ORWELL, *Marrakech* 650

"When you walk through a town like this—two hundred thousand inhabitants, of whom at least twenty thousand own literally nothing except the rags they stand up in—when you see how the people live, and still more how easily they die, it is always difficult to believe that you are walking among human beings. All colonial empires are in reality founded upon that fact."

JONATHAN SWIFT, *A Modest Proposal* 658

"I have been assured . . . that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or broiled. . . ."

SISSELA BOK, *Lies for the Public Good* 669

Lies told from "a desire to advance the public good . . . form the most dangerous body of deceit of all, [even though] liars tend to consider them as right and unavoidable because of the altruism that motivates them."

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"It's not that children kill sex. They just put it on hold."

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"'Macbeth was shielding somebody.' 'Who was he shielding?' I asked. 'Mrs. Macbeth, of course,' she said. 'He thought she did it and he was going to take the rap himself. The husband always does that when the wife is suspected.'"

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