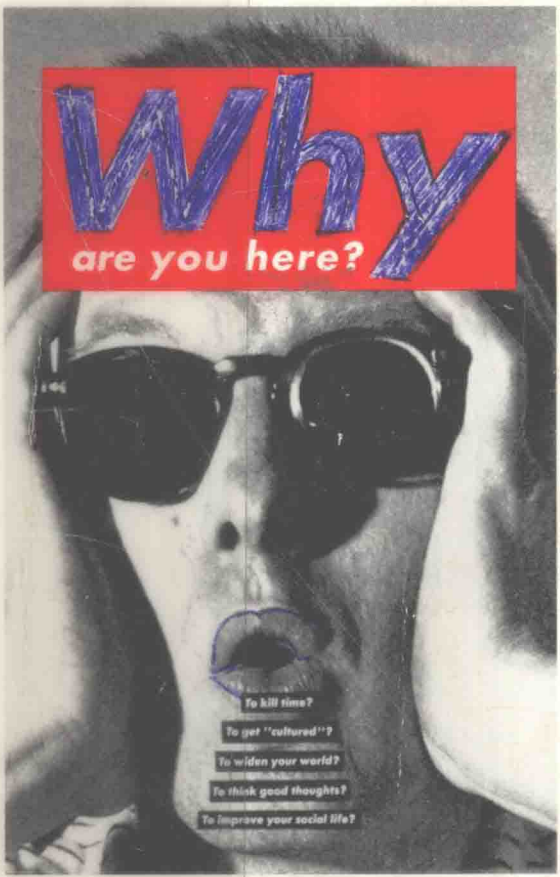
WRITING LIVES



Exploring Literacy and Community

Garnes • Humphries • Mortimer • Phegley • Wallace

WRITING LIVES
Exploring Literacy and Community

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THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY

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Preface to Instructors

Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community promotes critical reading, writing, and discussion as means of inquiry. While students may be familiar with literacy through public debates on illiteracy or functional literacy, our goal is to have students identify and understand their participation within various *literacies*. We have intentionally complicated the issue by focusing on *literacies* in the plural rather than on a single *literacy*. The readings themselves illustrate this complexity: No single definition sufficiently describes the many ways in which individuals come to understand the most effective means of reading, writing, speaking, listening, or behaving within a given community. The impact of social situation upon literacy, then, is a central focus of this text.

The pedagogy that informs this reader espouses a student-centered classroom where writing is taught as a process with multiple opportunities for drafting, receiving responses from peers and instructors before revising, and eventually developing a final draft. We also provide plenty of opportunities for writing informally, so that students can reflect upon and challenge their ideas as they think through their writing. As Donald Murray and others might put it, we intend to give students the opportunity to write to learn. We see reading and writing as related activities, and we encourage our students to approach these readings as writers themselves. Learning to read actively and critically encourages students to read for the details, generalizations, voice, tone, and style that can enrich their own resources as writers.

Since *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* was developed primarily by and for a community of writing instructors, we invite new instructors to enter into a dialogue with the book and with their students. While the emphasis throughout the book is on the readings, Part 1, "The Practice of Literacy," provides a pedagogical apparatus that gives new instructors a flexible, supportive structure for adapting the readings and assignments to their own needs and interests.

The "Explorations" sections that appear at the end of each reading, for example, are meant to spur students to think about their own writing and reading processes, to generate class discussion, to introduce concepts, to direct students' attention to rhetorical strategies used in the essays, to help students consider a particular theme in a reading, or to assist students in comparing how similar themes are treated differently by various authors. To reach these goals, instructors can use "Explorations" in a variety of ways. They can be used as in-class discussion questions, as the basis for small-group work or collaborative projects, as short writing assignments, as part of an ongoing writer's notebook, or as the starting point for longer writing projects.

The "Writing before Reading" prompts that are found before each selection are meant to generate student inquiry about issues raised in the reading. Students may respond to these prompts in a writer's notebook, which we discuss in Part 1, or in a class discussion.

The sections titled "Further Suggestions for Writing," which appear at the end of Parts 2, 3, and 4, can also be modified by instructors. These writing suggestions are deliberately complex, encouraging students to find their own way into a topic of inquiry or research. These suggestions offer general guidelines, and they are meant to be suggestive, not prescriptive. Instructors may assign these prompts as they are written and let students decide which aspects of the assignment to focus on, or they may discuss the prompts with their students and together construct a revised approach. Instructors might also work with their students in rewriting a particular part of a prompt to emphasize one of the many aspects that the prompt addresses.

Part 1 of *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* introduces strategies for reading and writing that are central to our approach in teaching first-year writing. While we expect that many instructors will supplement *Writing Lives* with a rhetoric, Part 1, "The Practice of Literacy," provides a context for the readings and accompanying suggestions for writing and discussion that follow. It is a resource that students and instructors can return to as they move through the readings and writing activities. The section on peer response, for example (pp. 16–19), is designed to help students become better peer responders and to help them learn how to incor-

porate feedback from their peers into their revised work. Since participation in peer responding groups or workshops is a progressive activity, students may return to this section to reflect on their own experiences and to continue to refine their own skills as peer responders and writers.

The next three parts contain selected readings, contextual information, "Writing before Reading," "Explorations," and "Further Suggestions for Writing." If used in the order in which the readings are presented, the book moves the student writer through three distinct but interrelated sections devoted to personal literacies, academic literacies, and public literacies.

The readings in Part 2, "Personal Literacies," were selected to prompt students to recollect and analyze their past literacy experiences within the context of particular communities. This unit encourages students to practice a stance they will develop during the course—that of a self-reflexive reader and writer—as they integrate the aims of the personal narrative with more common academic forms such as the expository essay. While Part 2 encourages students to see the value of their own experiences with literacy, it also suggests that they incorporate other voices—the voices of their communities and the voices of the authors they are reading—into their writing on literacy.

Part 3, "Academic Literacies," builds on the definitions of personal and communal literacies by examining what it means to be literate in an academic institution. Students consider social, political, and economic factors that influence how they negotiate the often difficult boundaries between home communities and the academy. In their writing, students examine multiple literacies at work in the university, including those not tied to a specific discipline or academic discourse. The "Writing before Reading," "Explorations," and "Suggestions for Further Writing" prompts in Part 3 ask students to use ethnographic methods to "read" specific sites and their attendant texts and develop analytic and persuasive essays presenting their interpretations.

Part 4, "Public Literacies," promotes further attention to audience and point of view by examining the significance of public discourse. The readings in this part examine how public images and media messages represent institutions and ideas and influence their intended audiences. The readings offer students ways of effectively engaging with and using public discourse in the academic sphere. While many students are familiar with the examples of public literacy described in the readings, instructors may also want to direct students beyond the readings to conduct research on particular examples of public literacy. A central goal of Part 4 is to help students participate in public literacies and negotiate representations of meaning in larger social contexts.

In taking such a broad view of literacy, *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* provides a rich resource on the topic of literacy that can be used by students and instructors as a springboard for further research. We invite instructors and students to use the book to enter the ongoing conversations about literacy.

The idea for *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* originated in 1993 with the staff of the First-Year Writing Program at The Ohio State University for use in its first-year writing courses. The reader was reorganized in 1995 to focus on the theme of literacy. We selected this topic for its obvious links to the study of reading and writing, and because it allows us to value the knowledge students bring to a first-year course while also encouraging them to examine critically how knowledge is constructed and used within various communities.

Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community is unique in other ways: It was largely developed and written by graduate-student writing program administrators for incoming graduate teaching associates in the First-Year Writing Program at Ohio State. It was designed and tested to be used in a one-quarter long writing course, but it can also be adapted to semester systems.

The Ohio State University, like many other academic institutions, relies heavily on graduate student instructors and adjunct faculty to teach first-year writing. We have kept these instructors in mind as we developed this reader, and we hope that *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* and its instructor's handbook will be particularly useful in programs with similar staffing demographics. We have attempted to provide first-year writing students and their instructors with a range of materials that illuminate the relationships between various literacy practices and individuals, communities, and cultures. While the readings explore the connections among culture and context evident in various language practices, the pedagogical apparatus of *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* challenges students to recognize the ways in which language carries values and power and, in turn, to use this knowledge as writers themselves. The organization of the readings and pedagogical apparatus emphasizes this invitation to students to enter into a dialogue with their instructors, with the readings, and with each other.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community is the result of a collaborative work-in-progress carried out among graduate teaching associates, faculty, and staff associated with the First-Year Writing Program at The Ohio State University. In 1993, and under the leadership and inspiration of Suellynn Duffey, the program reexamined its rationale and approach to first-year writing courses and the professional development of graduate-student instructors. *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* and the writing course it suggests have their roots in the first set of readings and two subsequent custom-published readers resulting from that reexamination.

The following editorial teams, consisting of graduate student writing program administrators, staff, faculty, and other graduate students, edited these earlier texts: Suellynn Duffey, Victoria Dunn, Sara Garnes, Vic Mortimer, and Jennifer Phegley (1995); Carrie Dirmeikis, Suellynn Duffey, Natalie Fields, Nathan Grey, Paul Hanstedt, Carrie Leverenz, Gianna Marsella, Vic Mortimer, Jennifer Phegley, Chuck Schroeder, and Melinda Turnley (1994); Teresa Doerfler, Suellynn Duffey, Jane Greer, Amy Goodburn, Paul Hanstedt, Carrie Leverenz, and Lori Mathis (1993).

Graduate students teach the majority of first-year writing courses at The Ohio State University, and their suggestions have been indispensable to the development of *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community*. The following graduate teaching associates deserve special acknowledgment for their work in piloting courses, proofreading, or otherwise contributing to this reader: Janet Badia, Jennifer Cognard-Black, Tinitia Coleman, Ben Feigert, Kate

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Thanks also to Meg Spilleth, Steve Debow, and Keith Mullins of St. Martin's Press for their persistence and assistance in getting this book to press.

We hope that *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* will serve well all those teachers and students who use it to examine the shared knowledge that contributes to their diverse literacies.

Sara Garnes
David Humphries
Vic Mortimer
Jennifer Phegley
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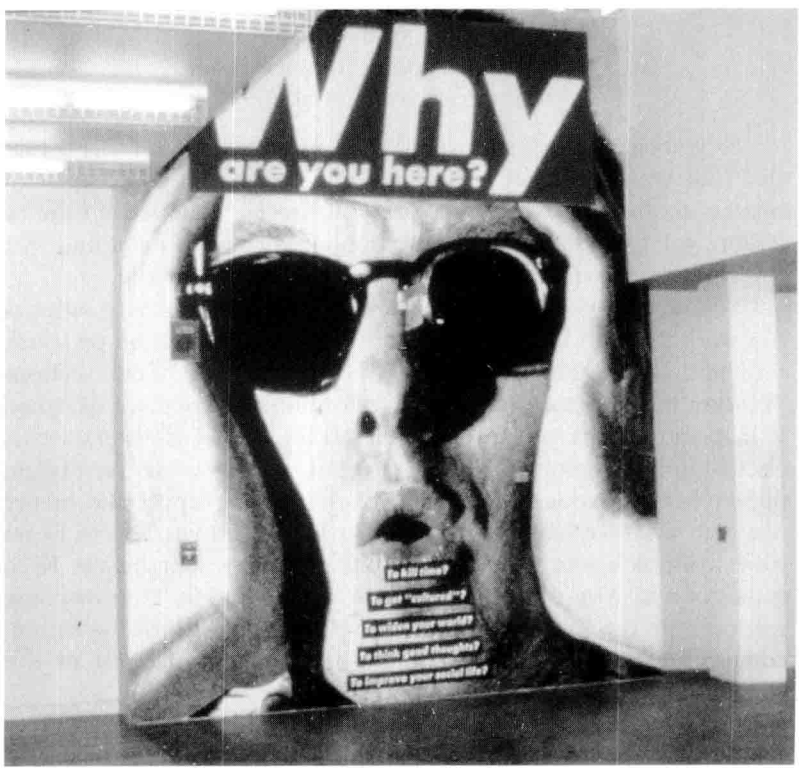
The Practice of Literacy

ENTERING THE CONVERSATION



As its title suggests, the selections in *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* explore the themes of literacy and community. But more specifically, this book encourages *you* to explore these themes through your own writing. Take a moment to look at the cover art by Barbara Kruger. This piece asks you, quite emphatically, "Why are you here?" Kruger's work, which combines language with visual imagery, takes up an entire wall at the bottom of the main staircase at The Ohio State University's Wexner Center for the Arts. It is usually the first piece of art that a visitor encounters at the Wexner, and it sets a definite tone for the rest of the visit. The visitor feels compelled to respond by reflecting upon the reasons why she or he is visiting this particular art center.

We selected this piece of art to encourage you to ask the same question of your participation in a college first-year writing course. Why are you taking this course? Why are you attending college? We admit that these are big questions with many implications. If you have trouble coming up with answers, consider the witty possibilities that Kruger included in her work. Look closely at the cover, and you will find even more text just below the figure's mouth. Are you here:

to kill time?
to get cultured?
to widen your world?
to think good thoughts?
to improve your social life?

As you can see, questions lead to more questions, a process that may lead you as a student (or museum visitor!) to come up with answers to the question "Why are you here?" Take some time to explore your responses to this question in writing. You will find that you will gain valuable insight into how and why you write.

We have provided you with numerous opportunities to write as you work through Part 1 and the subsequent selections on personal, academic, and public literacies. We have labeled these sections "Writing before Reading" and "Explorations." They are designed to help you explore your thoughts in writing as well as generate class discussion both before and after you read the selections. We explain these types of writing in more detail later in this chapter. But before you read what we have to say about literacy, we invite you to begin your work as a writer by responding to the prompt below. Keep copies of what you write in a folder or in a notebook. Your response will become the basis for some of your written work on invention, composition, and revision techniques throughout the rest of this chapter.

WRITING BEFORE READING

How do you define literacy? Who and what helped you to arrive at that definition? Is literacy learned? Can it be measured? How do we recognize a literate person?

LITERACY AND COMMUNITY

When you wrote about literacy in response to the "Writing before Reading" exercise above, you probably wrote about how literacy is connected to reading and writing. Literacy refers to the ability to read and write, but it is also about recognizing, valuing, and using many different kinds of knowledge, or what we call in this book *literacies*.

As a first-year writing student in college, you already possess tremendous abilities in reading, writing, and other language practices. But you may not be as aware of the other ways in which you are literate. Perhaps you are especially adept at deciphering the conventions of Hollywood movies or the intricacies of major league sports. Perhaps you are a member of two different language communities, conversing with your grandparents in Vietnamese while using English on campus and your job. Perhaps you are particularly aware of the differences between various places and their physical and cultural environments. These are all examples of the range of literacies you will explore in this book.

We mean to give you a sense of how literacy, in all its complexity, involves our ability to recognize the communities we belong to and the knowledge that they value. Literacy is generally thought of as something we acquire in our homes, schools, and communities. However, we find that it is more accurate to say that we also *practice* literacy. Literacy demands that we negotiate between communities while recognizing that not all communities value the same kinds of knowledge or behaviors.

As you read, write, and take part in classroom discussions about the topics raised by these selections, you will notice that many people, including some of the writers included here, find *literacy* difficult to define. Different cultures value literacy for many reasons. In the United States, we hear much talk about *functional literacy*, a type of literacy that ensures that people can read and write well enough to participate in the political process and the economic system. When most of us think of literacy, we often define it in these terms. We usually define *illiteracy* as the inability to read or write; this aspect of literacy is most often covered by the media. These definitions of literacy are popular, but they are also limited. Literacy, or even better, *literacies*, is a necessarily broad concept. Different literacies require different abili-

ties. Being literate in the United States includes things as seemingly mundane as understanding driving conventions and as politically relevant as understanding the basics of the U.S. Constitution. The former is important for navigating roadways and the latter for understanding the nuances of the latest presidential campaign as it is covered, for instance, in *The New York Times* or discussed in on-line chat rooms.

Literacy, then, can be broadly interpreted. It includes knowing printed texts as well as understanding practices, rituals, traditions, and even the layout of physical space and how it is used. If you want a quick experience of this extended sense of literacy, visit a service of a religious denomination that is not your own. You will probably notice some similarities; but you will also notice that the regular members of the congregation are much more in tune—or literate—about what is happening in that space than you are.

The selections in *Writing Lives: Exploring Literacy and Community* share a thematic concern with literacy, broadly defined. For some of these writers, for example George Orwell, literacy is tied primarily to the acts of reading and writing. For other authors, for example bell hooks, access to literacy also involves questioning access to power and privilege. Still other writers write about practices—such as Dumpster diving (described by Lars Eighner) or using computer technology (described by Barbara Kantrowitz)—that can also be understood as instances of literacy.

READING AS A WRITER

We wrote earlier that literacy is practiced within the contexts of various communities and social situations. If you start thinking of academic literacies as knowledge shared by certain groups in certain situations, you will begin to see how many literacies are at work on college campuses. Some of the literacies you practice while in college include those of your chosen major. Consider, for instance, how engineering majors and history majors use different professional jargon in their respective fields. But academic literacies also include learning how to participate in activities such as lectures and seminars as well as in college football games, fraternity or sorority parties, and other experiences unique to college settings. Academic literacies also include the lore, traditions, and values of particular institutions and of education in general.

Reading plays an essential part in your acquisition of these and other college literacies, and it also plays a significant role in how you acquire and participate in literacies (such as ecological and public literacies) that have application beyond your years in formal education. You already read for many reasons: to discover meaning and purpose,

to observe organization and style, to reflect upon the relationships between others' and your own writing, to determine where you stand in relation to an author's argument, and to build common ground for class discussions of both reading and writing. You may even read and write for the sheer pleasure of it. When we use the word *reading* in this book, we are referring to *active reading*. Active reading is the form of reading all your professors will expect you to carry out. When you read actively, your purpose may be to clarify your thinking, to further develop an assignment, or to answer a question.

Active reading requires that you read with a questioning mind. Your professors will expect you to come to class with well thought out questions about your reading. Learning to ask productive questions is part of acquiring the literacies prized in higher education. In your writing classroom, practicing your ability to ask questions of your instructors, peers, and the material you read will help you become a better writer. As you practice the art of asking questions, you will, among other things:

1. become more engaged with your reading and class discussions,
2. develop more focused papers, and
3. carry out more productive and, ultimately, more interesting research projects.

Reading and writing are interdependent activities. When you read with a questioning mind, you take part in a conversation with an author and his or her ideas. As you become more involved with your reading, you will find ways to *apply* what you read to your own writing projects. Your least successful work will occur when you "read up" on a subject and plunk down a string of quotes from established "authorities." Your best written work comes about when you reflect upon what you read and use it to support *your* ideas.

Reading actively and critically will help you write papers that you and your audience will find more engaging. Throughout *Writing Lives* we offer questions about readings to encourage you to think critically about the reading selections and your own writing. You will find "Writing before Reading" prompts throughout Part 1 and preceding each selection in Parts 2, 3, and 4. These questions are meant to engage your own thoughts and experiences *before* you read. We also include questions called "Explorations" after each selection. These questions are designed to help you prepare for class discussion as well as explore, through your own writing, your responses to what you read. "Explorations" typically direct your attention to specific features or themes central to each selection while inviting you to reflect upon your own writing processes. At the end of Parts 2, 3, and 4, we include "Further Suggestions for Writing." These sug-