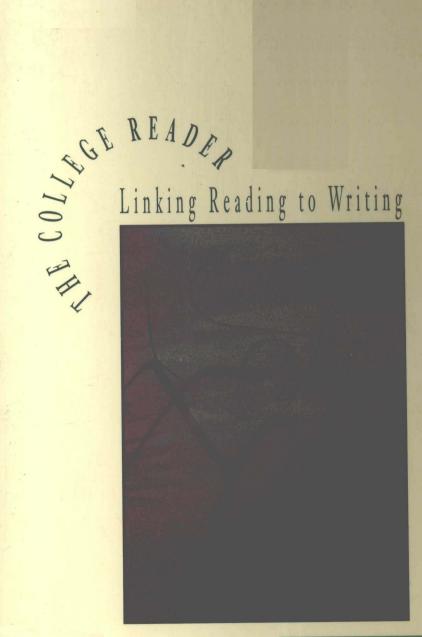
Linking Reading to Writing



## THE COLLEGE READER

Linking Reading to Writing

SUE LONOFF DE CUEVAS

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#### The College Reader: Linking Reading to Writing

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## THE COLLEGE READER

## **PREFACE**

I call this book *The College Reader*, a name with an implicit double meaning. It suggests the academic genre of the book, a collection of texts compiled and edited for use in college-level writing courses, and it alludes to the person who will read, reflect, and write in response to the selections.

The more I thought about the title's double meaning, the more I recognized its implications for the book's editorial policies. Composition courses have at least two objectives: to help students write papers that will satisfy requirements and to empower them as writers. But these aims do not always converge. Instructors often talk of giving students the incentive to speak in their own voices, but we also want to teach them how to speak like qualified members of the college community. Yet as soon as we launch them into academic discourse, we limit possibilities for unconfined expression and indicate that standards must be met. Small wonder if the accompanying messages—"Think for yourself"; "Don't be afraid to question"; "Stretch the possibilities"; "Explore"—seem mixed at best. Conceding that the paradox will never be resolved, I offer this collection as a way to make the most of it, through readings and assignments that belong in college courses and encourage independent thinking.

My first goal was to find and publish readings that would motivate students to respond. My intention was not to come up with a hit parade of articles, smooth and easy pieces they could follow without effort, but rather to find essays that would rouse their minds and feelings, inviting them to reach past what they know. I went after texts by writers who take risks in thought and action, probe for contradictions, admit to vulnerability—and do so with relish and commitment. In works by Amy Tan, Mark Mathabane, Elizabeth Swados, Richard Selzer, and dozens of others, I found what I was seeking. Additional models and incentives come from writers who explain and demystify the process of writing; they include Spike Lee, Barbara Tuchman, Gabriel García Márquez, and many more.

My next goal was to help instructors work effectively with the collection, keeping their divergent needs in mind. Some teachers rely on the questions and assignments that follow each selection and chapter. Others regard the apparatus as an option to be exercised when their agenda calls for it. Still others prefer to disregard it; they want the freedom to construct their own curricula, drawing on the readings as they choose. Acknowledging that no one book can satisfy all clients, I venture to respond to that diversity.

Questions follow every selection. In both parts they tend to progress in a sequence, eliciting personal responses, explication, analysis of theme and form, and clues to knotty issues. Although some clearly lend themselves to written

responses, they are rarely separated from questions for discussion since one teacher's choice for debate within peer groups may be another teacher's paper topic. The *Instructor's Manual* supplements the questions and indicates further ways to use them.

The Writing Links that follow every chapter are described in the introduction to the student. Links assignments typically call for initiative; students may construct a subject and an audience, argue unconventionally, or draw on their experience. Links assignments also help them manage process by outlining the stages of a complicated project so that students understand why they are being asked to do it as well as the tasks that it entails. In these ways, the Links subvert an either-or mind-set, as in "Either you can write what you really believe or you can give your professors what they want."

This is a thematic reader, with selections clustered in chapters that highlight an issue or a unifying topic: Human Rights, The Lively Arts, Sickness and Health. In addition, the chapters in Part One follow a sequence. Each chapter calls attention to an aspect or a mode of writing: personal response, description and summary, analysis, interpretation, and argument. For instructors who want to keep building on this sequence, an alternate table of contents provides lists of all texts according to rhetorical mode. The readings and assignments in Part Two reinforce those skills, though they are not arranged developmentally. Instead, they facilitate the double agenda, helping students find their identity as writers while familiarizing them with the conventions of the academy. Part Two begins with topics keyed to identity—family, gender, and writers' views on writing—and moves into curricular topics. This tidy distinction is misleading, however, because all chapters feature first-person narratives, rigorously logical analyses, and texts that defy easy labeling.

The College Reader was designed with respect for students of the 1990s. It also respects the writing instructor, whose load is heavy and whose tasks are multiple. I intend this collection to be workable, to stimulate students through readings they can care about, and to encourage papers worth the writing.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Sue Lonoff de Cuevas

## TO THE STUDENT

Can thinking independently make you successful in college? Can you express your own point of view when the professor or section leader tells you what to read and gives you instructions for writing? Suppose the readings are hard to understand, or they're boring and you don't know what to say about them? Your teacher will still expect you to produce, and if you don't get the point you're in trouble. What's the value of writing under those conditions?

Before answering, consider the assumptions behind these questions. One is that the meaning of a text is predetermined; either you get it or you don't. Another is that readings are innately dull or lively, hard to work with or easy to approach; these are built-in attributes, rarely modifiable, rather than impressions that can change. A further assumption is that meaning is singular; there's one best way or right way to read texts and write about them, as there's one best way to solve an equation. Still another is that meaning is like a commodity produced and made available by experts. It follows that students who are smart and well trained know how to unpack the meaning, put it to use, and earn profits in the form of high grades.

Every one of these assumptions should be challenged. While training helps, it cannot show you the one correct response to any reading or idea. In fact, by insisting on a single meaning you may overlook a text's potential riches. The instructor cannot give you the correct response in return for your tuition dollars. Ideas do not become your own because you've bought them or assembled them from other people's data, and they rarely arrive prepackaged in a text, like the prize in a box of Crackerjacks. Rather, they emerge and evolve as you reread, as you ask questions and take notes and talk about them.

Most important, they develop in the process of writing. Often, you will only discover what you think as you see your words and sentences take shape. Writing helps you to make sense of what you read, to find and sustain a perspective of your own, and to use other writers' thoughts as springboards to discovery.

That reading, thinking, and writing are connected is a fundamental premise of this reader. Together, they can open worlds of possibility and lead you to adventures of the mind. To venture successfully you must acquire skills, and it's the business of this course to teach them to you. But even with training, your work will come to life only when you have a personal stake in what you write and the conviction that what you say can matter.

The readings here are organized into two sections. The first, "Preparations," is designed to help you hone the skills you'll need for making intellectual journeys. Chapter 1, "Growing Up," will help you to express yourself. You'll

learn to articulate the concepts in the readings, to respond and make connections to your own life. Chapter 2, "Human Rights," will give you practice in describing. You'll continue to draw on personal response; you will also learn how to summarize effectively and how to find the points that matter most. Chapter 3, "The Right to Read," will give you practice in analysis. As you study an actual Supreme Court case on censorship, you'll learn how to define, draw comparisons and contrasts, trace causes and effects, and weigh the evidence. These techniques of analysis won't settle the arguments; the nation's highest court couldn't do that. Rather, they'll enable you to make informed assessments and support positions of your own.

Chapter 4, "Students of Culture," asks you to think about interpreting. How do these narrators depict ways of life and ideas that often seem strange to them? How well do they recognize their own preconceptions and attempt to become more objective? How do they distinguish between reasonable inferences and those that only look plausible? These questions, which students of culture have to ask themselves, are questions that all writers should consider. Chapter 5, "Ecology: Survival," will help you track the arguments in other people's writings. You'll read essays with a thesis that emerges up front and essays that develop issues subtly. As you become familiar with the strategies these authors use, you will think more clearly about your own arguments; as you see how they gather and focus information, you will gain insight into research possibilities. In progressing through these chapters, you will also learn how to communicate ideas to an audience. You'll be taught to envision a reader, or readers, and to think in terms of what they need to know.

The readings in Part Two, "Explorations," continue to exercise the skills you've honed in Part One, but instead of concentrating on any one activity (summarizing, analyzing, arguing, and so forth), these chapters offer you a mixture. Each one has a unifying topic, and each provides a variety of contexts for reading, discussion, and writing. You'll encounter works in many genres: formal and informal essays, book chapters, interviews, memos, reviews, reports, biographies, journal entries, meditations, case studies, letters, epigrams, transcripts of people talking, and a sprinkling of fiction. Chapter 6, "Between Parents and Children," and Chapter 7, "Between Women and Men," focus on aspects of identity. (In reading them, you may recall "Growing Up," the first chapter of the previous section.) Questions of identity extend into Chapter 8, "Perspectives on Writing," in which professional authors and editors explain why they write and how they work. They also provide information on strategies that anyone who writes will find useful: developing images, keeping a journal, doing research, drafting, and revising. Chapter 9, "The Lively Arts," highlights performers people who act, dance, sing, and play instruments, and people who create art unconventionally. Chapter 10, "American History and Myth," considers changing perspectives on the United States. Like Chapter 11, "Discovering Science and Math," it provides outstanding examples of writing within academic disciplines. "Sickness and Health," the final chapter, investigates health care, the training of doctors, and individual struggles against illness and disease.

In preparing this reader, I had further objectives: to celebrate cultural and

ethnic diversity; to represent both genders as equally as possible; and to open up questions about values. I have drawn on work by writers from a dozen countries, and from every region of the United States. Even where the entries appear traditional—in the section on American history, for instance—you will hear voices speaking on behalf of minorities, exposing the gaps in the record. Women and men, from their teens into their eighties, express their points of view and reflect on their experiences. As I kept collecting, I asked college students to review and evaluate my choices; their voices too contribute to the medley.

To help you explore and respond to the readings, the book includes a range of writing projects. The discussion questions that follow each selection will often generate topics for papers or brief in-class writing assignments. More extensive suggestions and instructions follow each chapter, in the Writing Links. Some Links assignments take you back to the readings, encouraging you to work closely with one or draw comparisons between related pairs. Other Links assignments show you how to use the readings as points of departure for independent research. Still others invite you to respond to a text through creative imitation.

Perhaps you don't see how creative imitation and self-expression go together. Try to think in terms of and—of combining, not excluding, possibilities. By examining models and discovering how they work, you become a more informed and educated thinker. By trying out the methods that experienced writers use, you make those methods part of your experience. As for the limits imposed by the assignment—or the teacher, or the course, or the essay form itself—all writers (and indeed, all thinkers) negotiate between the creative impulse and restrictions that come from many sources. Prose is never written in a void; it is evoked by situations, by problems, by employers, by readings that others require or recommend, and by publishers who pay for writers' services. Furthermore, it's rarely written without effort.

The good news is that in the very act of writing, as your pencil forms letters or your fingers roam the keyboard, you'll discover what you think and what you mean. In grappling with ideas, you'll develop the power to respond to texts, to argue, to communicate. Your ability to handle assignments will grow as you study the features that make good essays work and as you become more familiar with the expectations and conventions of academic writing. Discussions, workshops, activities with classmates, and your teacher's responses will all help you. You will only write papers worth reading, however, when you actively engage your mind and feelings.

S. L. C.

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