WRITING FOR CHANGE:

A COMMUNITY READER

ANN WATTERS
MARJORIE FORD

WRITING
FOR
CHANGE

A Community Reader

Ann Watters
Stanford University

Marjorie Ford
Stanford University

WRITING FOR CHANGE
A Community Reader

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

Writing for Change

A Community Reader

About the Authors

ANN WATTERS is a lecturer in English at Stanford University. She has directed the Program in Writing and Critical Thinking at Stanford and co-developed and co-directed the Community Service Writing Project. She has co-authored *Coming from Home* (1993) with Marjorie and Jon Ford and *Creating America: Reading and Writing Arguments* (1995) with Joyce Penn Moser. She also authored a forthcoming interactive CD-Rom multimedia program for teaching rhetoric.

MARJORIE FORD is a lecturer in English at Stanford University where she teaches in the Program in Writing and Critical Thinking and edits the program's newsletter, *Notes in the Margins.* With Jon Ford she has written and edited *Dreams and Inward Journeys* (1990 and 1994), *Writing as Revelation* (1992), and *Imagining Worlds* (1995). With Jon Ford and Ann Watters she has written and edited *Coming from Home* (1993).

Writing for Change: A Community Reader and *Guide for Change: Resources for Implementing Community Service Writing* were developed out of their experiences working in the Community Service Writing Project which is jointly run by the Writing and Critical Thinking Program and the Haas Center for Public Service at Stanford University.

Preface for Instructors

We all live in communities. As citizens we have an interest in addressing those social problems that undermine the well-being of our communities: homelessness, health care, family policy, educational reform, and environmental protection. As a nation, and as individual citizens, we need to inform ourselves and to think critically about these issues. In our families, our schools, in the work place—at political forums, social groups, religious congregations—we make decisions that help to shape and define our lives. *Writing for Change: A Community Reader* has been designed to inform students and to help them reflect on the issues that they face as members of their communities.

Writing for Change: A Community Reader is appropriate for first-year and advanced courses in composition. Instructors can use this text as an issues-oriented reader that provides thoughtful readings on community. Chapter themes include "Family and Community", "The Individual and the Community", "Education and Community", "Social and Economic Struggles in the Community", "Health and Community", and "Nature and Community." *Writing for Change* offers both traditional and innovative writing assignments. Each chapter includes a range of choices, from reflective, personal essays, to argumentative essays, to research projects that take students to the library and off campus into their communities.

These assignments enable students to develop their skills by writing not only for classroom audiences, but also for communities beyond the classroom. Such writing assignments might include letters to the editor of the school newspaper, articles and informational brochures, grant proposals, interviews, press releases, or fact sheets for local community groups or schools. *Writing*

for Change: A Community Reader can be used in a number of different ways. The book can serve as an issues-oriented reader. Instructors may ask students to write expository or argumentative essays on social issues or to develop journal entries that connect the readings with situations in their own lives or their communities. For those students already engaged in community work, asking them to keep a writing journal will provide them with a place to reflect on the connections between their community experiences and their readings for the course. Instructors who want to develop a course with more emphasis on community-based work or community service writing may want to look at the companion text, *A Guide for Change.* This text provides worksheets that outline the practical and pedagogical issues that will arise as students complete community service writing projects. Examples of community service writing projects produced collaboratively by students are also included.

COMMUNITIES OF WRITERS

Writing about community issues in nonacademic as well as academic contexts is radical in the true sense of the word: students are returning to the roots of the discipline and to the practical concerns of Aristotle and Quintilian. Like the classical rhetoricians, students undertake writing to effect change, writing to move, writing to carry on in day to day living—if not in the courtroom and the political arena, then in modern public forums for discussing local and global concerns of contemporary society. Our approach emphasizes the role of the writer working in the context of the community, trying to convey information and viewpoints not only clearly and concisely but also responsibly.

In the academic world students take courses in different disciplinary communities: for example, in physics class, they learn the language of physicists and the issues important to physicists; in sociology courses, they learn the concerns, the approaches, and the language of social scientists. One of our goals in designing *Writing for Change: A Community Reader* was to extend the Writing across the Curriculum approach to the next logical step: enabling students to write well for diverse communities not only within, but also beyond the academy.

PREPARATION FOR OTHER ACADEMIC SUBJECTS

A key concern in integrating writing for community audiences is the degree to which it prepares students for writing in other academic subjects. Many instructors, students, and administrators see the first-year composition course as one that primarily trains students to write academic papers. Yet, as many have observed, college is short, and life is long. Students need to learn strategies that will serve them in both in the academic and nonacademic worlds. And surely there is little conflict of interest; "real-world" writing assignments require the use of processes, modes, and strategies of writing that are funda-

mental in academic papers and traditional composition classrooms: observing, gathering information, interviewing, summarizing, reporting, narrating, analyzing, explaining, and arguing to persuade. In contrast to the classroom research assignment that often relies primarily on library research, community service writing projects frequently involve reflection, analysis, and integration of information from diverse sources, including interviews from professional speakers and average citizens as well as library sources. *Writing for Change: A Community Reader* encourages students to increase their awareness of context, audience, and research to a greater degree than many traditional academic essay assignments require.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Picciotto, Spellman College; Alan Powers, Bristol Community College; Jeff Sommers, Miami University; and Edward Zlotkowski, Bentley College.

Special thanks go to our students who learned with us and helped us to shape and develop both the text and the community service writing project. Much of their work is included in this book; many more outstanding pieces of writing continue to inform and enlighten the students' academic and neighborhood communities.

Finally we thank our friends and families who formed a sustaining community with us and around us as we wrote and rewrote, shaped and edited, the many drafts of *Writing for Change: A Community Reader.*

<div style="text-align: right;">

Ann Watters
Marjorie Ford

</div>

Introduction for Students

YOUR ROLE: WRITING FOR CHANGE

As a writer you have a double identity, a dual role: you write for yourself and you write for an audience. This double identity is at the core of many writing issues. Writing begins as a personal act. Because we think about what we are writing, because we try to express our observations, thoughts, and feelings through our words, we feel closely connected to what we write. At the same time, we strive to communicate clearly to our readers, to our audience. *Writing for Change* is designed to help you write for academic and public communities. Through writing, individuals can share and argue for what they believe in and can involve others in the issues that are important to them, both as private individuals and as members of a community.

Writing for Change encourages you to understand your thoughts and feelings through class discussion, through writing about the readings, and through sharing what you have written with your classmates. Your writing process may begin with an inner struggle to express what you feel and think. Then you will need to work on revising, clarifying, and shaping your ideas, selecting the most accurate and expressive words, composing clear sentences, developing paragraphs with clear examples, and using effective organizational strategies to communicate and to persuade. Relying on your friends and classmates for feedback will become an essential part of your writing process. As you share your writing and develop dialogues with the other students in your class, a community of writers will begin to form. You will find that the feed-

back from your peers and your instructor helps you to shape, clarify, and refine your ideas. You will begin to understand more fully the importance of expressing your ideas in a way that reflects an awareness of your audience's interests and background knowledge of your topic.

Your writing may touch only a handful of your friends or those in your classroom. Your words may speak to members of your community, or they may move many people to make serious changes in their values and their attitudes towards others. The words of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech, delivered in 1963 at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC, to an audience of 250,000 people, changed the world irrevocably:

> [N]ow is the time to make real the promises of democracy; now is the time to rise from the dark and desolate valley of segregation to the sunlit path of racial injustice to the solid rock of brotherhood; now is the time to make justice a reality for all of God's children.

Expressing your thoughts and feelings clearly, communicating your point of view to your audience, will bring you many rewards. You will begin to feel a sense of connection or community with those to whom you write, and to realize that your words can make a difference. Writing that asks others to listen and offers meaningful information, an intelligent analysis, or a practical solution can effect real change. Writing for change will empower you and have an impact on the community for whom you write. Words can be tokens, messengers, calls to action, or battle cries; they can be special gifts or songs.

THE THEMES THAT BIND: A COMMUNITY READER

A community can be thought of as a group of people with something in common, something that binds them together: a common history, culture, interest, activity, need, or goal. As you are forming a writer's community in your classroom through sharing your writing, the thematic structure of this text will help you to develop a better understanding of the relationships you have as an individual with the many communities to which you belong. At its best, a community can provide you with the motivation to change and to grow, and the support to rethink your plans and goals when they don't work as well as you had hoped. It is also important to develop a sense of allegiance to your community and work to help the community maintain itself and prosper.

Because we cannot always rely solely on ourselves or on our families for support, we need to turn to a variety of groups and communities. Family, neighborhood, workplace, college classes, social groups, special interest groups, political groups, religious groups—all of these communities help you to shape your identity. Each of the six chapters in *Writing For Change: A Community Reader* explores a different aspect of your relationship as an individual with the larger communities to which you belong. The chapters may also introduce you to new issues of community. The selections in Chapter 1, "Family and Community," present different ways that individuals come to define

themselves and their needs as individuals and as members of their first communities, their families. Chapter 2, "The Individual and the Community," provides historical, theoretical, and personal perspectives on the reasons why individuals form, benefit from, and help to sustain their communities as they shape their self-concepts and goals. The chapter presents definitions of democracy, community, and altruism, as well as personal responses to these definitions. The selections in "Education and Community," Chapter 3, explore the challenges that today's educators must face and overcome if they are to shape educational curricula that address the changing needs and interests of today's students and their communities. While some of the chapter selections advocate programs that educate individuals through integrating theoretical knowledge and practical experience—through observing, studying, understanding, and serving their communities—other selections call for a return to a standardized academic curriculum.

Chapter 4, "Economic and Social Struggles in the Community," examines issues that less privileged groups of individuals—working-class people, women, ethnic and religious minorities—struggle with in the hopes of making better lives for themselves within their communities. The selections in "Health and Community," Chapter 5, present a range of health issues that are influenced by community values, including the decentralization of health care, changing medical ethics, the role that community support plays in the healing process, and the AIDS crisis. Finally, Chapter 6, "Nature and Community," looks at the natural world as an extension of our human community. From a variety of perspectives—political, social, personal and ethical—the writers selected for this chapter come to similar conclusions: if we can observe, reflect upon, and respect the integrity of our natural world, our human communities will function in a healthier and saner way.

THE RANGE OF READINGS

Each of the chapters includes both professional and student writing. While the majority of the selections are essays, stories and poems were also chosen. Many of you will discover that your essay writing will improve through reading a variety of texts; you may want to use a particular essay as a model or you may think that the readings are interesting because of the issues, feelings, and even paradoxes that they present. Our students frequently find themselves identifying with the characters and emotions expressed in stories and poems; we hope that the literature selected will speak to you.

The student writing included in *Writing for Change* takes the form of essays, poetry, and research papers. In addition, each of the chapters features a community service writing project that was completed by students who worked with one another and with a supervisor at a nonprofit community agency. The included projects provide you with examples of types of writing that can be completed for agencies in your community: brochures, newsletters, public service announcements, fact sheets, and researched reports. Many of our students

have shared their enthusiasm about working on these projects. Jeremy Taylor, whose essay appears in Chapter 3, has explained why his project became a meaningful learning experience: "This project introduced me to people, to ideas, and to situations that I would not have experienced in the classroom. It illustrated that I am able to reach out to people through my writing." As Taylor suggests, a community service writing project can create a bridge between two communities: the academic world and the "real world."

THE RANGE OF THINKING AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Journal Topics

Each reading is introduced by a journal topic. Approach these topics with an open mind; write down what you think; try to capture your thought process as you write. Don't censor what you write, worry about your spelling, or force yourself to write in a particular form—just write down what comes into your mind as you respond immediately to the topic. If you write in your journal on a regular schedule, your writing will improve. Writing without the anxiety of thinking that your teacher will be reading and grading what you have written may help you to better understand yourself and your unique way of expressing ideas.

Questions for Discussion

Following each selection are six questions for discussion. We suggest that you think about these questions right after you have finished reading the selection. Jot down any answers that come to your mind and skim the selection to see if that helps you to formulate answers. If you are stumped by some of the questions, don't worry; you will get a chance to discuss these selections with the other students in your class. Also remember to write down questions that you have about the selection. Take these questions to share with your discussion group. The more questions you ask yourself about any selection that you read, the more likely you are to become engaged in understanding what you are reading. Our questions were designed to help you think about thematic issues, organizational strategies, and ways that the writer was conscious of engaging his or her audience. Some of the questions encourage you to think about how the selection you are reading is related to another selection in the chapter.

Ideas for Writing

These topics offer a variety of writing assignments for short and more developed papers. Some ask you to respond personally or creatively, while others

ask you to write an analysis or a comparison. You will also find argumentative topics, and other subjects that will involve you in library research or in interviews with members of your community.

Chapter Writing Projects

These assignments provide you with ideas for connecting the subthemes that are interwoven into each chapter and encourage you to do library research, to write book or movie reviews, or to do field research or writing for a community agency. Further writing suggestions and specific information on how to complete community service writing projects are included in *A Guide for Change,* which we have developed to accompany this text.

We hope that as you read and write your way through *Writing for Change,* you will come to understand that writers can help to bring about significant change in their communities. Writing for change is a realistic form of social action that involves research, reflection, and personal commitment. We encourage you to give yourself a chance to write and to let your voice be heard.

<div align="right">

Ann Watters
Marjorie Ford

</div>

Writing for Change

A Community Reader

Contents

3   Education and Community   139

4   Social and Economic Struggles in the Community   206