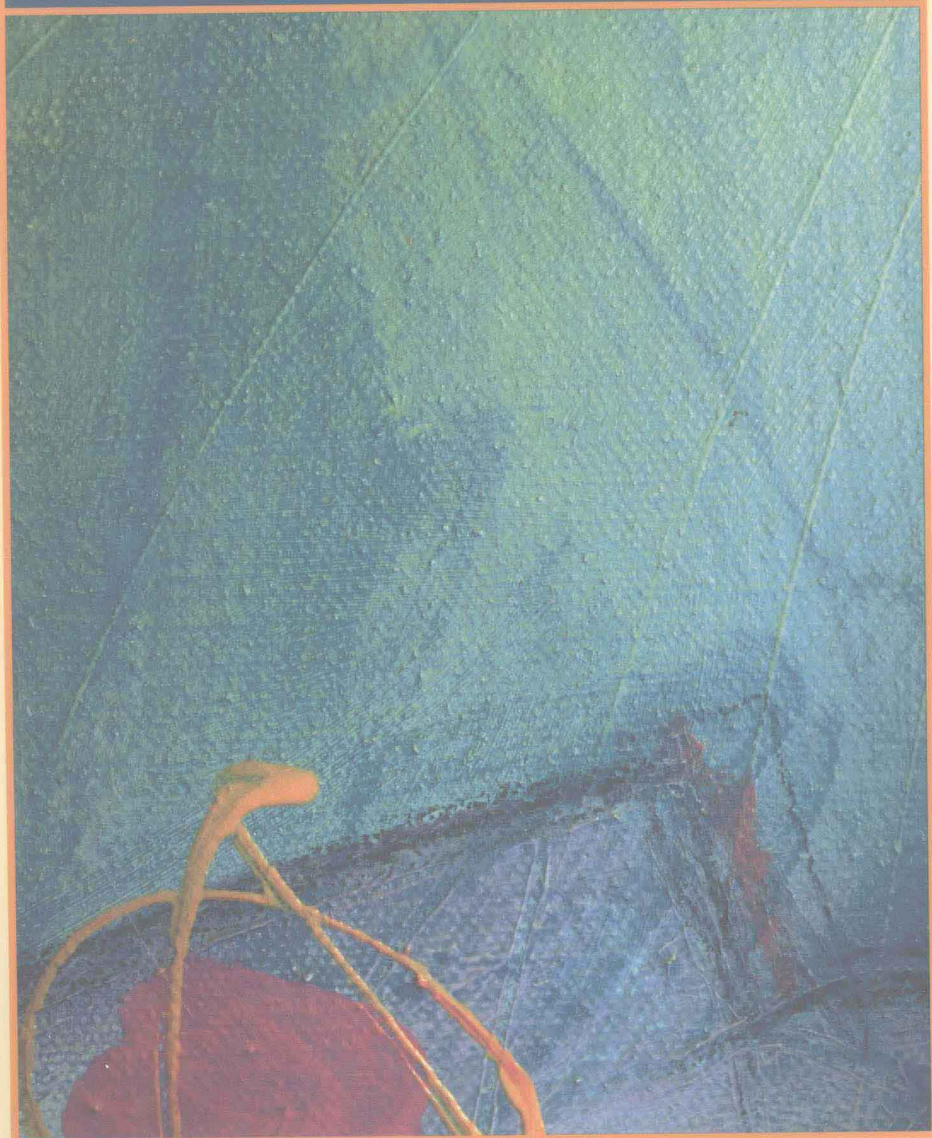


HIGHER LEARNING

Reading and Writing about College



PATTI SEE ■ BRUCE TAYLOR

Higher Learning

Reading and Writing about College

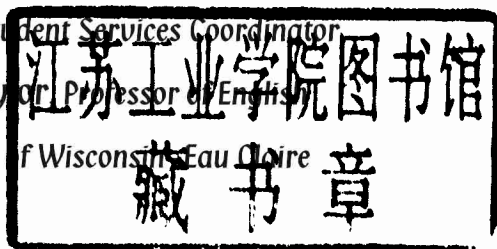


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Preface

“

***Higher Learning provides students and teachers a vehicle
to explore, reflect on, and perhaps even discover issues
about ethnic, class, age, gender, and sexual diversity.***

”

Imagine entering a foreign country where you understand just enough of the language to communicate but cannot quite grasp the customs or the etiquette of the land. Imagine you had to learn the culture of that country without anyone showing or telling you how. This is what going to college is like for many first-year students.

Higher Learning: Reading and Writing about College presents imaginative literature—fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction—that appeals to students and teachers because it is written from their point of view. It is literature that allows them to see how their individual experience fits into the culturally and historically diverse traditions and perspectives of university life.

Avid readers—students, teachers, and lifelong learners—know literature is the one place a person is never alone. This collection allows readers to discover people just like them, as well as people sometimes so different from them to be almost, at least at first, unimaginable. Students can watch these people struggle with problems and challenges, most of which never appear in any college catalogue or on any class syllabus. Though universities provide an array of student support systems, there are some aspects of university life that new students must work through mostly on their own. Character, maturity, and experience will be as essential to success as high school class rank or SAT scores. Alienation, isolation, and loneliness will be as much of a challenge as English Composition or Calculus.

Many college texts for first-year students focus on time management, critical thinking, active reading, and lecture and text note taking. These survival skills are the nuts and bolts of college success. This collection, written by people who have “been there and done that,” displays the whole machine chugging along in all its imperfect glory. These readings provide good and bad examples, some broader views and alternative takes of individual experiences, parables of the admirable, cautionary tales, and funny stories.

College students, especially first-year students, often feel isolated on campuses. The degree to which students feel a “connectedness” to a university, a sense of place and a way of fitting in that many teachers and administrators by now take too much for granted, leads to how well the students perform, in fact whether or not they complete a degree. *Higher Learning* offers some of the “inside” stories of college life, addressing the difficult issues that students face in their transition to college. It also

provides students and teachers a vehicle to explore, reflect on, and perhaps even discover issues about ethnic, class, age, gender, and sexual diversity.

How to Use This Book

Reading and writing questions are provided as a part of the text and should be read before and after reading each piece of literature, as a way to get readers involved in the kind of close and active reading done at the college level. In addition to providing prompts for class discussion, Critical Thinking Points, offered before and after each piece under the categories of *As You Read*, *After You've Read*, and *Some Possibilities for Writing*, accomplish the following objectives:

- 📖 provide a focus for each reading
- 📖 help readers formulate their own questions while they read
- 📖 provide a historical and/or cultural context for the reading
- 📖 create a forum for reader response, analysis, and critical reflection
- 📖 promote creative writing and expository responses that connect readings to students' personal lives
- 📖 provide prompts for informal and formal writing assignments, such as journal entries, class presentations, collaborative group writing projects, and research papers
- 📖 make connections between readings and other classic pieces of literature that are easily found in most college libraries

Each chapter of *Higher Learning* focuses on a particular stage of college life.

Chapter One, "Where We're Coming From: Leaving Other Lives," explores the aftermath of surviving 12 years of formal education, the personal and cultural influences that affect making the decision to go to college, the possibility of teaching oneself, and how to find and follow the future that awaits us.

Chapter Two, "School Daze: Life in the First Year," delves into personal examples of coping with such dilemmas as roommates, failing grades, balancing home and school, applying course work to real lives, meeting professors' expectations, and sifting through advice and models to find the most appropriate and valuable ones.

Chapter Three, "Student Affairs: Friends and Lovers," looks at issues of first love, virginity, rape, AIDS, sexual discovery, homosexuality, romantic breakups, and platonic friendships. These pieces demonstrate just how difficult it is to try to establish equal respect between and among the sexes given the various roles that social expectations play in gender relationships.

Chapter Four, "Teacher, Teacher: Will This Be on the Test?" probes the always complex relationship between students and teachers, as well as between professors themselves and the university system. This section helps students see teachers as

people with many of the same ongoing concerns and challenges that the students face every day.

Chapter Five, “Been There, Done That: Looking Forward, Looking Back,” shows it is never too late to look ahead, offering pieces that explore life after graduation and the advantage of hindsight when offered by people who have survived what today’s students are trying to get through.

“Some Films for College Lives” are listed at the end of each chapter to complement the sections with a popular culture perspective that explores the depiction of college in cinema since 1927. An appendix offers critical thinking points about the films.

There are many larger college issues that require additional reflection and analysis, perhaps in the form of extended research. *Further Suggestions for Writing*, a list of prompts at the end of each chapter, accomplishes the following objectives:

- 📖 creates a forum for analysis of academic and social issues at college
- 📖 synthesizes topics from chapter readings
- 📖 provides prompts for traditional rhetorical strategies in persuasion /argumentation, comparison/contrast, cause/effect, and classification.

Our goal in providing this book is that students will not only be motivated to read, but they will be moved to reflect and write about their own experiences, their campus, their college life in general, and the world around them.

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Chapter One

Where We're Coming From: Leaving Other Lives



College is the place to explore different people, languages, cultures, lifestyles, ideologies, and livelihoods. The selections here examine a variety of times and places and will help you begin to realize how geographic area, family size, religious affiliation, ethnic background, and any other outside influences affect who and what any individual becomes.

This chapter will explore —

- Overcoming stereotypes and prejudices
- Sacrifices that are sometimes made in order to attend college
- Various reasons for going to college
- Formal education that does or does not prepare students for adult life
- What it means to be “self-educated” and the values of learning on one’s own
- The benefits of planning for a future or waiting for your future to find you

Incurring My Mother's Displeasure

from *The School Days of an Indian Girl*

Zitkala-Sa

“
Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted,
I began anew my life among strangers.”
”

Critical thinking points: As you read

- 1) What are some clues as to the era?
- 2) The language and tone of this essay are very formal. Why might that be so?
- 3) Speculate on what causes prejudice among ethnic groups. What are some stereotypes, past or present, of Native Americans?



In the second journey to the East I had not come without some precautions. I had a secret interview with one of our best medicine men, and when I left his wigwam I carried securely in my sleeve a tiny bunch of magic roots. This possession assured me of friends wherever I should go. So absolutely did I believe in its charms that I wore it through all the school routine for more than a year. Then, before I lost my faith in the dead roots, I lost the little buckskin bag containing all my good luck.

At the close of this second term of three years I was the proud owner of my first diploma. The following autumn I ventured upon a college career against my mother's will. I had written for her approval, but in her reply I found no encouragement. She called my notice to her neighbors' children, who had completed their education in three years. They had returned to their homes, and were then talking English with the frontier settlers. Her few words hinted that I had better give up my slow attempt to learn the white man's ways, and be content to roam over the prairies and find my living upon wild roots. I silenced her by deliberate disobedience.

Thus, homeless and heavy-hearted, I began anew my life among strangers.

As I hid myself in my little room in the college dormitory, away from the scornful and yet curious eyes of the students, I pined for sympathy. Often I wept in secret, wishing I had gone West, to be nourished by my mother's love, instead of remaining among a cold race whose hearts were frozen hard with prejudice.

Zitkala-Sa (1876–1938) was a Sioux Indian. “Incurring My Mother's Displeasure” appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1900. It is a part of her larger work, *The School Days of an Indian Girl*.

During the fall and winter seasons I scarcely had a real friend, though by that time several of my classmates were courteous to me at a safe distance.

My mother had not yet forgiven my rudeness to her, and I had no moment for letter-writing. By daylight and lamplight, I spun with reeds and thistles, until my hands were tired from their weaving, the magic design which promised me the white man's respect.

At length, in the spring term, I entered an oratorical contest among the various classes. As the day of competition approached, it did not seem possible that the event was so near at hand, but it came. In the chapel the classes assembled together, with their invited guests. The high platform was carpeted, and gayly festooned with college colors. A bright white light illumined the room and outlined clearly the great polished beams that arched the domed ceiling. The assembled crowds filled the air with pulsating murmurs. When the hour for speaking arrived all were hushed. But on the wall the old clock which pointed out the trying moment ticked calmly on.

One after another I saw and heard the orators. Still, I could not realize that they longed for the favorable decision of the judges as much as I did. Each contestant received a loud burst of applause, and some were cheered heartily. Too soon my turn came, and I paused a moment behind the curtains for a deep breath. After my concluding words, I heard the same applause that the others had called out.

Upon my retreating steps, I was astounded to receive from my fellow students a large bouquet of roses tied with flowing ribbons. With the lovely flowers I fled from the stage. This friendly token was a rebuke to me for the hard feelings I had borne them.

Later, the decision of the judges awarded me the first place. Then there was a mad uproar in the hall, where my classmates sang and shouted my name at the top of their lungs; and the disappointed students howled and brayed in fearfully dissonant tin trumpets. In this excitement, happy students rushed forward to offer their congratulations. And I could not conceal a smile when they wished to escort me in a procession to the students' parlor, where all were going to calm themselves. Thanking them for the kind spirit which prompted them to make such a proposition, I walked alone with the night to my own little room.

A few weeks afterward, I appeared as the college representative in another contest. This time the competition was among orators from different colleges in our state. It was held at the state capital, in one of the largest opera houses.

Here again was a strong prejudice against my people. In the evening, as the great audience filled the house, the student bodies began warring among themselves. Fortunately, I was spared witnessing any of the noisy wrangling before the contest began. The slurs against the Indian that stained the lips of our opponents were already burning like a dry fever within my breast.

But after the orations were delivered a deeper burn awaited me. There, before that vast ocean of eyes, some college rowdies threw out a large white flag, with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it. Under this they had printed in bold black letters words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a "squaw." Such worse than barbarian rudeness embittered me. While we waited for the verdict of the

judges, I gleamed fiercely upon the throngs of palefaces. My teeth were hard set, as I saw the white flag still floating insolently in the air.

Then anxiously we watched the man carry toward the stage the envelope containing the final decision.

There were two prizes given, that night, and one of them was mine!

The evil spirit laughed within me when the white flag dropped out of sight, and the hands which furled it hung limp in defeat.

Leaving the crowd as quickly as possible, I was soon in my room. The rest of the night I sat in an armchair and gazed into the crackling fire. I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me.

1900

Critical thinking points: After you've read

- 1) *Was it easy to feel empathy for the narrator? Why or why not?*
- 2) *In what ways is Zitkala-Sa "homeless"?*
- 3) *Read or reread Booker T. Washington's selection from Up from Slavery. How is Zitkala-Sa's experience at college similar to Washington's? How is it different?*
- 4) *Historically, learning "the white-man's ways" has separated Native Americans from their heritage. Why would the narrator physically and spiritually separate herself from her people in order to go to college? What are some details from the story that show this?*

Some possibilities for writing

- 1) *Imagine what happens when the narrator finally returns to her tribe. Write the reunion scene between Zitkala-Sa and her mother.*
- 2) *Recall a time when you purposely disobeyed your parents. What circumstances led to this? Write about the moment you knew you would go against their wishes. What was the outcome?*
- 3) *The narrator feels isolated from her classmates because of their prejudice. Have you ever felt isolated from classmates, friends, or family? Write a scene describing your isolation or someone else's.*
- 4) *Though the author is given the respect of her classmates when she wins the oratorical contest, she still feels the loss of her mother. Choose another character from your reading, from popular culture or from your own experience who is torn between home and school, and compare Zitkala-Sa's experience to that character's.*
- 5) *Research the number of Native Americans at your university. Seek out a Native American student and interview him or her about individual experiences of*