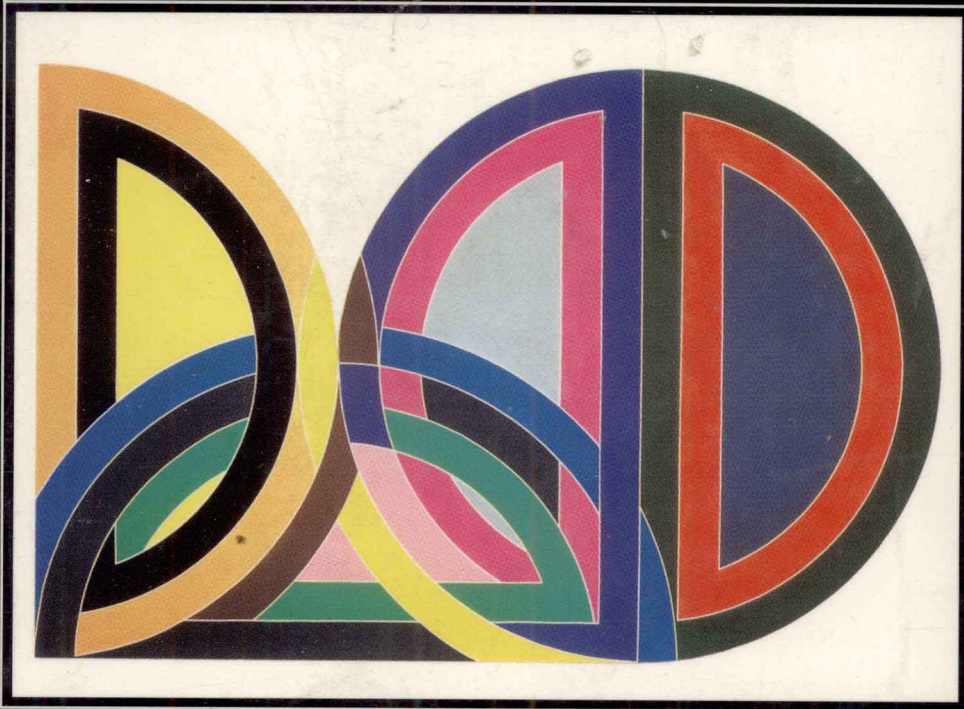


Interconnections

Writer, Culture, and Environment



Carol Lea Clark

INTERCONNECTIONS

Writer, Culture, and Environment

Carol Lea Clark

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PREFACE

Interconnections: Writer, Culture, and Environment is a reader rhetoric intended for first-year composition courses. As the title indicates, *Interconnections* focuses on the multiple and interrelated connections between a writer, his or her culture, and the surrounding environment.

RATIONALE FOR *INTERCONNECTIONS*

Writing is important: An important way an individual determines his or her own version of self and the world is through writing. The texts we read in the world—and in this textbook—do not always agree with each other; competing voices give facts and opinions, argue positions, and request action. We determine what we agree or disagree with through the process of reading, interpreting, and putting thoughts on paper or on a computer screen. *Interconnections* encourages students, following the example of the professional and student writers in the text, to consider themselves as writers in the context of culture and environment.

Making connections is important: As Americans, we live in a mobile, fast-changing society. In many ways this is good; we have opportunities for personal growth and change. In some ways this is also bad; it can also result in disconnectedness from other people and from the natural world. Writing is an important way of reaffirming old connections and creating new bonds with other people and with the world around us. *Interconnections* does not preach about which connections are good and which are bad; rather, readings have intentionally been chosen to suggest a variety of perspectives and to offer opportunities for debate.

DISTINGUISHING FEATURES OF *INTERCONNECTIONS*

Student Voices: One of the most compelling and unusual features of *Interconnections* is the presence of student voices in each chapter. Every reading in each chapter is followed by student responses. Students from several different universities nationwide have evaluated the readings,

discussed the content, explained what they like or dislike; and they sometimes refer to a connection they see between their own lives and the points the author is making. A sample student essay is included in each chapter. Students using this textbook are invited in each chapter to write their own responses to individual readings in the form of a journal, as well as creating an essay or other text. Thus, *Interconnections* is a conversation among many distinct voices—the writers of the readings, the student writers whose response to those readings are included, the editor, and the instructors and students who will use the finished text. Not all of these voices agree; the readings advocate several positions on each topic, and the student comments offer criticism as well as praise.

Activities: Each chapter has suggestions for journal entries, individual and group activities, as well as the writing of essays and other texts. Additional activities are included in the instructor's manual.

A Writer's Process: Each chapter is followed by a section called "A Writer's Process" which contains rhetorical support for the textbook with in-depth coverage of critical reading, invention techniques, structuring an essay, other writing situations, revision techniques, research strategies, etc. These sections are written so that they can be taught in conjunction with the chapter they follow, or they can be used in any order an instructor wishes.

Casebook: Research articles from a variety of media (newspaper articles, letters to the editor, magazine features, and press releases) and perspectives on one topic are gathered in the Casebook. The topic is "The Proposed Mescalero Apache Tribe's Spent Fuel Initiative: Opportunity, Danger, or Racism?" The Casebook includes an introduction to the subject, prewriting activities, writing suggestions, and a sample student research paper. Students can use the Casebook to practice combining their own ideas with material from outside sources, without having also to spend time finding those source materials. They can then apply those skills in more extensive research papers in the current (or a later) class.

Appendices: A full discussion of using library and database sources for research papers and an explanation of how to document sources is included in the Appendices.

Instructor's Manual: All nine chapters and the Casebook in *Interconnections* are fully supported with instructional background material in the *Instructor's Manual* by Lorie Gravley. Readings are considered thoughtfully, with individual and group activities and suggestions for ways to amplify class discussions and facilitate the writing process.

ORGANIZATION OF *INTERCONNECTIONS*

Interconnections begins with “Envisioning the Writing Self,” a chapter of readings by professional authors about how they write. Donald M. Murray, Gail Godwin, Annie Dillard, Calvin Trillin, and others detail what it is like when they sit down at a computer or typewriter and struggle with producing texts. By reading these selections, students are encouraged to reflect on their own writing processes, noticing similarities and differences between what they experience and what the professionals describe. Student writer Alberto Mesta notes about the Donald M. Murray reading, “I have always had the image of what a writer is, a person who in every situation finds inspiration and instantly creates a poem or a book. This image of a romanticized writer inflicted doubts on me, that the way I write was flawed. . . . Thus, I was pleasantly surprised by Mr. Murray’s article. His habits showed me that my way of writing wasn’t wrong. In fact, he and I shared some habits, such as . . . writing too slowly for all the ideas I have in my head.”

Next are two related chapters, “Belonging to a Culture, Being Shaped by a Culture,” and “Reconnecting People, Places, and Self,” in which writers such as Bill Moyers, Deborah Tannen, Bruce Shapiro, and Michael Dorris reflect on connections to their cultures, communities, families, and homes. Scott Russell Sanders, for example, in “Web of Life,” reminds us that while America’s celebration of individual rights and opportunities is a cornerstone of our country, we also have a strong tradition of caring for the community. He writes, “Taking part in the common life [of the community] means dwelling in a web of relationships, the many threads tugging at you while also holding you upright.” Student writer Jaimie N. Verlander responds to Sanders with these words: “The human spirit cannot flourish unless it is loved and cared for by fellow humans, but too many people don’t see that. We need to bind together and form a community wherever we are People need people. When disaster strikes, the authorities aren’t always there, but the members of your community are.”

Following are three chapters that focus on connections between individuals and the natural world. In these chapters—the largest grouping in the text—writers such as Ann Zwinger, Linda Hasselstrom, Robert Finch, Barry Lopez, Thomas Palmer, and Alice Walker suggest different ways of looking at how people affect and are affected by the environment. Annie Dillard’s “Seeing,” for example, in the chapter “Becoming Aware of Nature,” explains the pleasures of examining nature minutely, looking for the “unwrapped gifts and free surprises” in nature such as the killdeer nest in the field by the creek and a green ray of light at sunset. Student writer Noel Cisneros responds, “Dillard writes about a type of seeing that is usually left to little kids. It’s not something that only little kids can

do. . . . Seeing that way should be something everyone can do and should do. It's a return to innocence. Seeing this way is a means of relaxing, a means of becoming 'one with nature.'"

In modern times, seeing the natural world also means being aware of the pollution and destruction around us. Rachel Carson's reading, "The Obligation to Endure," in the chapter "Revisioning the Environment," points out, "The most alarming assault upon the environment is the contamination of air, earth, rivers, and sea with dangerous and even lethal materials. This pollution is for the most part irrecoverable." Student writer Amanda Williams responds, "I'm not advising us to stop the growth or keep technology out of our lives. I just think that we ought to sit back and see how what we are doing or going to do will affect our future and the futures of generations to follow."

The environment, to many writers, is not just "out there," to be observed, whether celebrating its beauty or mourning its destruction. Nature is with us, in our cities and towns, as well as our national parks and crop lands. In the chapter "Reconnecting Culture and Environment," writers connect to the environment, make it part of their lives, and write about others who do the same. William Least Heat Moon, for example, writes about the residents of a small town in Kansas, population five, who dwell with uneasy peace in a canyon in Kansas which floods every few years. He concludes, "These people of Staffordville. . . . They are not boastful, but they relish, not have beaten the river, but having held their own with it and not yielding to it other than by climbing a flight of stairs. . . . They are held here by recollections of what the river has given them: hours of a family bound tightly like shocks of wheat, of moments when all their senses were almost one with the land." Student writer Hugo Ivan Loya says of the Staffordville residents, "They acknowledge the power nature possesses, but at the same time they realize that they are also a part of nature and have that same kind of power inside of them."

The latter portion of the book widens the focus, looking at the individual, culture, and environment in terms of connections to technology, to work, and to values. According to Daniel Boorstein's reading in "Technology, Culture, and the Self," we now live in a machine world, not a natural world, a world he calls "The Fourth Kingdom." He writes of how we live uneasily in this world, "What baffles and frustrates us is that in this new kingdom—of computers, television sets, automobiles, airplanes, cellular phones, etc., etc.—that we ourselves have made, we feel increasingly out of control." Student writer Kristi Welch says in response, "Machines can't solve the world's problems. Mostly because it's really only a small portion of the world that has access to machines. . . . We take it for granted that other people have the same access to technology that we do, but I suspect that Rwandan refugees really couldn't care less about Pentium drives." Additional readings by Nathan Rosenberg, Donald

Norman, Albert Gore, Jr., and George Brown further consider the impact of technology in our lives.

As adults, we spend the lion's share of our lives at work, a subject not often considered in first-year composition readers but featured in the chapter "Living and Working," which has readings by Thomas A. Stewart, Katherine Griffin, Richard Wolkomir, and James Barron. Not all workplaces are created equal, according to Robert Levering who, in "Inside Great Workplaces," describes the sometimes surprising characteristics of good workplaces. It's not the money or the perks, says Levering, though those are nice. Instead, what is important are qualities such as "trust, pride, freedom, family, being treated fairly, being allowed to make mistakes." Student Susie James wrote after reading Levering's text, "Someone told me once, 'Any job is a good job if you make it a good job.' I suppose that means that if you put your heart and soul into any job, trying your best, it will pay off no matter what the job title or description. I think that is partially true. Certainly, enthusiasm and dedication to a job would result in better performance, which might result in increased responsibility and promotions. But . . . taking a job is a risk. Being aware of some of the factors Levering discusses and looking for them in a workplace might make a job choice at least an informed risk."

How individuals construct their lives, what connections they make with other people, places, nature, technology, and jobs, depends finally upon "Examining Values," the subject of the last chapter of *Interconnections*. Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert E. Lane, Brenda Peterson, Lewis Thomas, Thich Nhat Hanh, and others discuss what, in their perception, should be valued. Allen Tough, for example, in "A Message from Future Generations," imagines humanity many generations from now and ponders what residents of the future would say to us in order to influence our actions. According to Tough, they would urge today's humans to "celebrate your unique place in human history. The people of your decade face the historic challenge of making the shift from a narrow, self-centered, short-term focus to a long-term global focus" Student Jim Adams writes in response, "I've never given the idea much thought about future generations, what they might say if given the chance. . . . Some of the suggestions were a little farfetched, like balance the budget! . . . The truth is if we don't emphasize improvement, our future ancestors will be in trouble."

Readings in *Interconnections* are "real-world," the types of readings students might encounter in other classes across the curriculum or in their personal reading, and each is presented in the rhetorical context of its original place of publication. The chapters are organized by topic rather than by particular pattern or mode of discourse, and each chapter includes writing assignments that can be addressed in different modes. Thus, students choose a discourse appropriate to the writing situation, rather than looking for a topic to fit a particular mode. Most chapters

offer writing assignment suggestions that can be addressed in a personal essay; most offer suggestions that can be addressed in a persuasive or argumentative essay. Many assignments involve topics about which students have special knowledge or interest. The kinds of writing requested of students in the text's writing suggestions also will increase their skills in the discourse they will utilize during college, in their personal lives, and in their careers.

PREFACE TO THE STUDENT

As humans we lead interconnected lives. As children we learn who we are from those around us—family and friends. As adults, we are grounded in the culture or cultures which nurtured us and taught us how to live. The natural world, the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the landscape we gaze upon also touch us in ways both subtle and profound. The authors in this textbook write about connections—between themselves, their families, their cultures, and the natural world.

As a student of first-year composition, you too are a writer. You will be reading texts, commenting on them, and making connections to your own life. For example, student Elia L. Madrid wrote after reading Ann Zwinger's "The Lake Rock," in Chapter 4

Like most people, Ann Zwinger has a "special spot" in which no one would bother her and in which she can feel free to let her mind wander and not worry about the many problems she might have at the moment. I believe [Zwinger] picked that special place at the lake because of the ever changing scenery. The awareness of nature, I feel, is the most calming and sensational feeling everyone can relate to.

I, too, have a special place where I like to go to get away from life's hardships. Since I live on the outskirts of town, there's not much scenery, just pure desert and brush—lots of brush. It may not seem too great, but at night, right before the sun sets, I often wander far out into the desert where no one can find me. As I wait for the sun to set, I notice many things but mainly the color of the sky. There are so many shades—crimson, blue, lavender, dark purple—that it's almost impossible to describe it all.

Elia read Zwinger's text and began to think about a place that was as special to her as was Zwinger's lake rock. This is what essays do; they touch us by reminding us of our own experiences, our own lives.

Interconnections begins with a chapter in which authors discuss how they write. Reading the selections, you may be amazed at the similarities between your own writing process and that of professional writers. The following chapters focus first on connections between the individual and culture, then the individual and/or culture and environment. The next portion of the book makes connections between writer/culture/environment, technology, and the world of work. The final chapter considers how we as individuals develop a sense of values, an awareness of our own perceptions of what is right and wrong.

In the chapters, you will find introductions and student responses to each reading. A section called “Entering the Conversation” will propose ways you can add your voice to the dialogue. Suggestions concluding each chapter offer a variety of approaches to writing assignments. Following each chapter is a section called “A Writer’s Process,” which considers topics such as critical writing, prewriting, and revision.

Writing is important. It is a meaningful way we determine our own understanding of ourselves and the world. It is also a significant way we communicate with others. If you are comfortable with your writing, you have a tool which will empower you in your career as well as your personal life.

I hope you will find *Interconnections* stimulates your interest in writing. You won’t agree with all the authors. You probably won’t like all of the essays. That’s okay. Let the authors suggest connections you may not have discerned before. Let the authors provoke you. Let them inspire you to write.

CAROL LEA CLARK

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