



Introduction

by Jessica Brantley, Frederick W. Hilles Professor of English and Kim Shirkhani, Senior Lecturer in English

This seminar was designed to draw connections between reading and writing, between how we analyze a writer's craft and how we create our own persuasive pieces of prose. The readings we assign in an English course often give students something to write about, but they rarely serve as a direct model for their own writing. Students read novels and write expository essays about them, for example. Even when they read nonfiction, they write analyses that take up the same topics or questions without necessarily taking on the same rhetorical strategies. In the Yale National Initiative seminar *The Craft of Writing and Revision*, we explored ways of teaching writing through reading models and practicing craft.

Because extensive and thoughtful reading is always the basis for good writing, the seminar read and analyzed a number of essays to serve as examples of excellence in the writer's craft. Organized to emphasize a particular strategy or set of techniques each day, the model texts served to ground and enrich our seminar discussion. Daily short (250-word) writing prompts keyed to these techniques—similar to those in Yale's legendary course Daily Themes—asked Fellows to take inspiration from the models and our in-class discussion.

We also explored the value of the workshop environment to crafting good and effective writing. We workshopped four Fellows' "themes" each day from Tuesday of the first week through Thursday of the second, including opportunities to revise following general discussion. The rhythm of writing and rewriting, as well as the give-and-take of seminar discussion, created its own sense of close-knit community, individualized attention, and personal challenge.

The curriculum units that emerged from the seminar ranged widely, but all seek to give students the chance to grow as writers.

Tara Brady bases her unit, "**Using Micro-Mentor Texts to Promote Self-Discovery in Writing**," mainly on two ideas we emphasized in the seminar—that students can best learn writing techniques by seeing them in practice and that weekly and even daily writing practice is crucial to students' development as writers. Thus, the unit relies on very short model texts—whole pieces and excerpts—with concentrated impact and the advantage of being emulable and sharable even given the rigorously paced schedule of her 7th-grade ELA class. Brady's unit is designed to motivate her students, build their writing stamina, and put writing even ambitious pieces within their reach.

Josefa Castelli's unit "**Help Me Find the Words: Rhetoric, Workshop, and Memoir in Middle School**" prioritizes not only what it teaches her middle-school writing students to do but also their consciousness of their ability to learn it. The unit starts small—literally, with a genre known as the six-word memoir, which

students both read as mentor texts and try their hand at writing. Castelli's aim with the brevity of these pieces (eventually growing beyond six words) is multifold: to restore to students a sense of control over their language; to refresh their view of the world around them; and to encourage closer attention to, and more authentic engagement with, their own thoughts and feelings.

Miranda Clauschee, in her unit **"Painting Pictures with Words: The Art of Sensory Imagery in Narrative Writing,"** seeks to impart skills of written description to middle-school ELL students in a way that's both imaginative and hands-on. By way of physical "centers" constructed in the classroom (each featuring culturally relevant objects appealing to one of the five senses), Clauschee's students will be guided to develop descriptive language with reference to concrete objects and the corresponding senses. The unit promises to meet students where they are by linking writing techniques to the students' actual physical experiences of the world around them.

LJ Delao has developed an anti-racist writing unit—**"Remembering, Retelling, Reclaiming Our Stories: Decolonizing Storytelling"**—that aims to reframe ninth-grade students' relation to the language(s) they encounter at school. First, the unit encourages students to recognize the ways in which academic styles might cut them off from their indigenous language cultures, and to re-valorize uses of language beyond formal English. Then, students engage in oral interviews and oral storytelling, reclaiming their families' past experiences and narrating them in a variety of media and modes.

Eric Jackson's unit, **"Defensible: The Art of Writing a Persuasive Argumentative Essay,"** takes a systematic approach to teaching high school juniors and seniors—especially low-income and multi-language learners—researched argument with special emphasis on evidence and empowerment. Through lessons on understanding argument structure, analyzing rhetorical appeals, evaluating evidence and sources, crafting counterarguments and rebuttals, and the creative aspects of writing persuasively, Jackson's unit aims to prepare students to write at a college level and to appreciate how written argumentation can influence, inform, and inspire both its writers and its readers.

Heidi Lemon has developed an ambitious unit, **"The Harlem Renaissance—Uniting A Community of Artists,"** with both content-based and compositional goals. Responding to gaps in the normal third-grade ELA curriculum, the unit guides students through deeper exploration of artists of this period via research and gives them opportunities to write about their findings in a more creative way than they are used to. Using activities such as group reading, journaling, library visits, workshops, and arts integration (presenting their research in various forms, such as poems, songs, plays), Lemon's unit aims not only to teach knowledge and skills but to instill in her students an awareness and appreciation for this crucial moment in American cultural history.

Julian Lopez-Carmona's unit, **"Voices from the Renaissance: Letters Through Time,"** offers fifth-grade students historical perspective on the purposes of writing through both content-based and skills-based instruction. The unit introduces students to the letters of some of the most interesting people of the Renaissance—from Leonardo da Vinci to Catherine de Medici—and to the rhetorical techniques that those writers employed to persuade their audiences. Then, students write their own "renaissance" letters—drafting, revising, and proof-reading their creations before sharing them in a school-wide celebration.

Perrine Punwani offers her eighth-grade students a unit that is designed to inspire them as writers: **"My Voice: The Making of Me."** Exploring a number of personal essays and memoirs, students approach the professional pieces as models, learning to read for the writerly qualities that make them successful. Using the framework of Ruth Cullham's 6+1 writing traits, students learn to appreciate the effects of professional writers' ideas, organization, voice, sentence fluency, word choice, and use of conventions—before trying their

hand at similar components of fluid and successful prose. Regular workshops give student writers the chance to put their work before an audience and learn from readers' reactions.

“Don’t Let the Robots Win: The Importance of Writer’s Craft and Revision,” a unit created by **Tara McKee**, addresses the elephant in the room with regard to student writing in 2025: Artificial Intelligence. In her IB and AP English classrooms, students focus on their own writing, but they also explore the differences between machine-created and human-created text. Reading models of five different types of personal essay—the humorous essay, the segmented essay, the defamiliarization essay, the braided essay, and the hermit crab essay—students get to try their hand at a range of writerly techniques. At the same time, Al creates a version of each essay-type. In reading the machine-created text along with their own work, students carefully assess the strengths and weaknesses of each one, finally voting for the essays they admire most.

Anna Raphael’s unit, **“Love Letters to Our Lives: Creative Craft for Young Writers,”** aims to inspire second-grade students with an interest in playful, creative language even at an early age. Introducing young readers to simple poetry that celebrates sensory experience and the sounds of words, the unit offers them the chance to compose their own “love letters” in poetry and prose. After reading Pablo Neruda, for example, they will write their own “odes” to favorite animals and toys. Along the way they will have the chance to experiment with literary devices such as sensory description, personification, word choice, oxymoron, enjambment, and repetition.

Alison Wollack offers her high school students an environment for exploring the power of personal narrative in her unit, **“Finding Your Voice: Reading, Writing, and Revising Personal Narratives.”** Reading pieces from Sherman Alexie, Lynda Barry, Roxane Gay, Amy Tan, and Alice Walker as models, students will write their own essays, which can be (but need not be) used for college applications. Paying attention to writerly techniques that create enticing beginnings, smooth transitions, and effective endings, students will write and revise their work multiple times, learning how the process of writing can help them to discover their own voices.

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