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A THEORY OF STORY AS ARGUMENT:
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DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
2000

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ABSTRACT

An analysis of textbooks designed for first-year college writing courses reveals that introductory composition classes often require students to write personal experience narratives, but such assignments generally treat narrative discourse as peripheral to the primary work of "Beginning Composition," that of learning the principles of argumentative and persuasive discourse.

Drawing on folkloristics, the present study asserts that, in fact, narrative writing is a form of argumentation that seeks to persuade its audience. Using the theories of prominent folklorists, this paper contends that writing teachers can design courses that integrate narrative writing and persuasive writing to show students how to assert and defend arguable propositions. The work of first-year composition students is evaluated, and two annotated course syllabi demonstrate how classes taking a narrative approach to argumentation might be designed.
For
Mom, Dad, and Granny
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A few weeks ago, at the end of the Spring 2000 semester, I asked my students to reflect back on their experiences in English 101 and discuss what they had learned. One young woman began her essay, “Writing. Could there be anything worse? Could there be anything better? Getting to the final product is such a long and drawn-out process; it can really frustrate a person. However, when you hold the finished piece of writing in your hands, the frustration fades into pure satisfaction.”

Amen.

Fortunately, I have had the help of many wonderful teachers and friends as I have worked on this paper, and I would like to acknowledge them here.

First, I wish to thank my dissertation committee for their wisdom, guidance, patience, and encouragement over the many years during which this work has been in progress: Professors Patrick B. Mullen, Andrea A. Lunsford, Amy Shuman, and Kay Halasek. I am grateful, too, to Professors Daniel R. Barnes and John B. Gabel for their knowledge, support, and inspiration; their help was invaluable to me throughout my graduate student “career.”
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While I was a graduate student at Ohio State, I had the good fortune to take a position in the Writing Workshop, where I had the chance to observe the teaching of Mindy Wright. From Mindy, I learned how to challenge students and how to support them as they go about their work for their classes. I hope to one day achieve some small measure of the skill Mindy has as a writing instructor, and I thank her for being such an excellent role model.

My dear friend Eric Walborn is another person whose example I try to follow in the classroom. Eric showed me how to be myself with my students, and for that essential lesson I will always be grateful.

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No one could have better parents than my mother and father, Melinda and Lewis Cox. They have tirelessly, selflessly sustained me in everything I have ever
wanted to do and taught me to believe in myself from the very beginning. I will always remember the look of joy that lit up my mother's face the day I raced home from kindergarten to read a book to her for the first time. I will also always remember something my dad said to me one day as we took out the Crayolas to fill in my new Snow White coloring book. I told him not to make the sky green and the grass pink, but he told me, "It's your picture; you can color it any way you want to." For these memories, and countless others, I thank them.
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CHAPTER 1

AN INTRODUCTORY NARRATIVE

Victor Villanueva, chair of the 1998 Conference on College Composition and Communication, invited prospective participants to “break with precedent” and devise “new lines of research, or new ways of conducting research.” He additionally asked that potential speakers consider taking a rather unusual route to presenting the findings of that research, suggesting that they come to the meeting with studies to report and theories to assert but also with tales to tell; his contended that scholars need not always follow the conventions of academic discourse to learn from one another. Playing on a common Spanish expression—Te cuento de mi historia—Villanueva called for us to share with one another “the stories of our histories.”

Several recently published books by highly respected scholars in the field of composition attempt the very sort of “break with precedent” for which Villanueva called as he began planning the 1998 CCCC. In the introduction to How to Catch a
Shark, a collection of first-person narratives about his experiences as an educator, Donald H. Graves writes, “I submit that the well-told, well-chosen story can tell the most about the qualitative status of both teaching and learning in the classroom.” And in Narration as Knowledge: Tales of the Teaching Life, edited by Joseph Trimmer, theory and practice are examined, but the authors of the book’s twenty essays do not “follow the sanctioned procedures of educational research”; instead, they “play with the devices of storytelling (scene, dialogue, point of view),” seeing personal experience narrative as a viable means of determining and reporting “crucial information on the teaching and learning of English” (xii).

In the spirit of Villanueva’s, Graves’s, and Trimmer’s recent work (and in the spirit of reflexive ethnography), I begin my dissertation by telling “the story of my history.” What follows is a narrative concerning my experiences as a teacher of college composition and a chronicle of my project’s evolution.

I began teaching writing at age twenty-one, with no real idea of what I was getting myself into, a mere three months after earning my bachelor’s degree in English from a small private college. I entered the graduate program in English at Ohio State University in 1982 and was employed there for the next ten years, first as a graduate teaching assistant, then as a lecturer, and finally as an instructor. I began taking graduate courses with the idea that I would eventually become a literature professor specializing in twentieth-century American fiction, but my plans quickly changed: in my second semester at OSU, I took a course with Daniel R. Barnes and became irretrievably “hooked” on the study of folklore (specifically, folk narrative).
And I found the challenges and rewards of teaching writing to be irresistible, too—I knew right away that I would always want to help beginning students sharpen their communication skills.

In my ten years at Ohio State, I had the chance to teach a fairly wide range of composition courses: a two-quarter course sequence for students needing extensive preparation for college writing [English 052 and 053]; a one-quarter basic-writing class [English 060] for students needing a less intensive course than 052/053; the standard first-year writing class required of all OSU students [English 110]; and an intermediate-level writing class taken by students who had completed English 110 but wanted or needed more college writing experience [English 210]. Because I was able to teach in a variety of situations and for a number of different populations of OSU students, I became more and more familiar with the kinds of experiences and needs students bring to the composition classroom, and I had ample opportunities for experimenting with assignments that not only drew upon what students already knew but also addressed their needs as developing writers.

I have continued to develop my sense of what students know and what they need in my work at Belmont University, a small liberal arts college in Nashville, Tennessee. Since 1992, I have been an assistant professor of English in the Department of Literature and Language. There, too, I have worked with a wide variety of students, teaching basic writing [English 90], the two-semester first-year writing sequence [English 101 and 102], and advanced composition [English 351] for both English and Education majors. I have also tutored in Belmont's Writing
Center for the past six years; this, too, has refined my sense of where students tend to be competent and where they need to develop in terms of their writing.

Over the last sixteen years, I have come to believe that my role as a writing teacher is to create conditions under which students can determine for themselves what critical thinking and effective communication entail, in the process leading them to see how their experiences shape their identities and their “worldviews,” providing them with the ideas that they are compelled to share in their writing. And in developing and refining my basic writing and first-year composition courses, I have learned that asking students to work with “political” subject matter via their personal experiences can create conditions conducive to the kinds of discoveries and achievements first-year students need to make.

When I say that I seek to have my beginning writing students study “politics,” I use the term in its broadest sense. I do not ask them to “take sides” in issues currently before the country’s voters, nor do I assign papers pertaining to matters of government; rather, I give them the task of investigating complex subjects in which there are people maneuvering within a unit or group in order to gain control or power. I have had my greatest successes in asking my first-year writers to investigate the politics of gender or the politics of popular culture.

I believe these topics have had the greatest success with students in part because they are more or less “new” to them. Entering college students report again and again that no one has ever asked them to think for any length of time about the ways that our traditional expectations of the different genders have shaped the world.
around us. Likewise, they say they have rarely, if ever, been asked to consider popular culture phenomena—such as television, film, music, magazines, etc.—as matters worthy of serious academic consideration and are astonished to learn that such things reflect the values and attitudes of their time and culture. These subjects are "fresh" to them, and so they approach them with greater enthusiasm and curiosity than they might other, more familiar types of material. Moreover, it appears that they come to see the invitation to analyze these subjects as a signal that they are advancing in their intellectual sophistication and abilities: early on in my courses, once they have been guided through academic analyses of gender roles or various aspects of popular culture, students seem to feel they have gained new insight into things that the "average" person takes for granted but the "learned" person knows to have meaning. Many students have left my courses expressing sentiments akin to those of Mike, who wrote upon his completion of a three-hour basic-writing class [English 060]:

...My papers have matured because I have matured. One reason that my writing has matured is the fact that I am here at OSU and I have been exposed to new and strange things. But the other reason is that I have been able to write papers on a topic that I have not done before. We wrote several papers on gender issues instead of story or fact papers which I got a lot of in high school. They made me think and write about real issues that are out in our society rather than making something up or going to the library and finding some information on a famous person. This made my papers a whole lot better... because lots of thought and change went into them.

But I believe that the key to the success I have had in asking students to deal with gender and with popular culture lies in learning to put narrative at the center,
rather than on the margins, of the course. A purposeful presentation of narrative, I have found, can help students understand the workings of argumentative essays. I came to this revelation as I began to make use of my training as a folklorist. Folkloristics views the creation of a personal experience narrative as a critical enterprise, and if this notion of narrative is carefully explained to students, it can provide a vocabulary and a set of concepts through which persuasive essays can be approached. To explain my theory further, I would like to trace the development of my courses concerning “the politics of gender” and “the politics of popular culture.”

In 1989, I began asking my basic-writing students to read and write responses to three sets of current newspaper and magazine articles covering different aspects of subjects on which a wide range of opinion is possible—handling parent-adolescent conflict, dealing with various forms of discrimination, resolving ethical dilemmas in education. After sharing their “Reader-Response Journals” with one another during small-group activities and whole-class discussions, the students wrote more fully developed essays, pursuing one of their claims on each of the three topics in greater depth, arguing for their ideas on the basis of relevant personal experience and observation.

Repeatedly as they completed these assignments, the students reported that they had rarely—if ever—been deemed “experts” on a subject by virtue of their own first- or second-hand knowledge of their surroundings. Coming into the class, they believed generally that papers can be based only on “information from the library” and that a person is qualified to argue for an opinion only if she has consulted the
appropriate reference sources and "looked up" a significant number of readings on her topic. Once past some initial fear about relying solely on their own experiences, they welcomed the chance to draw on things they had seen and heard and felt for themselves. And once they were explicitly "permitted" to make personal investments in their subjects and had freed themselves of the burden of speaking in other people's voices, many of them wrote what I considered papers of unusual sophistication and depth. Many of them shared my opinion of this work, telling me, as I indicated earlier, that they felt successful as writers for the first time, or successful in different, more satisfying ways than they had before. It seemed that using personal narratives both to formulate and support their conclusions about various social issues helped the students to evolve as thinkers and writers—something that, in their opinions, those high-school "story or fact papers" had not done.

Following these courses in which the students experienced such success at entering into political discussions via personal narrative, I was prompted to create a new syllabus, one in which I more consciously drew on both my experiences as a composition instructor and my background in the study of folklore. As I designed the course curriculum, I sought to position my basic-writing and freshman-composition students as investigators of social and cultural tradition in the hope of creating meaningful contexts for the different kinds of essays they would produce.

While discussing issues of discrimination with my basic-writing students, I discovered that most of them had never been asked to look critically at, among other
things, the ways in which matters of gender can inform our views of ourselves, direct our behaviors, shape our interpersonal relationships, affect the roles we play in our society. Because our consideration of "The Politics of Gender" had never failed to spark heated debate in class and had apparently led to exciting revelations for the students, I sought to develop a series of assignments that would ask students to explore, in a variety of ways, gender roles and their impacts on our lives.

One of my sections of English 110 in the spring of 1990 was to be populated by students in OSU's Academic Support Program, so I knew that these students were coming to me having just completed a two-quarter basic writing sequence [English 052 and 053] and that their work in those classes had followed fairly closely the syllabus outlined by David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky in Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts. (Bartholomae and Petrosky's reading and writing assignments charge the students with "15 weeks' constant study of a single subject" [48], "Growth and Change in Adolescence"; they gradually move the students from storytelling to theory-building—from narrative to argument.)

Because I wanted to provide some continuity for these students as they made the transition from 053 to 110 and because I wanted to continue challenging them as they had been by the Bartholomae and Petrosky assignments, I decided to link my assignments thematically on the issue of gender and to construct them so that they required the students to move between the concrete and the abstract in a number of different ways.
To spark discussion on the subject of gender, I had the students write an essay on the first day of class: "Anatomy aside, what is the main difference between men and women?" During our next class sessions, the students shared the contents of the papers they had written in response to this prompt. This prepared them to write personal-experience narratives in which they described and evaluated incidents that were somehow determined or affected by matters of gender. They also began to respond in journals to essays I supplied for them, examining, among other things, problems of gender discrimination, the agendas of "the men's movement," what "the next wave of feminism" might and should be like.

At the center of the course were collaborative projects conducted by four small groups of students. Each group was charged with the task of reporting on "gender roles" as they are played out in a particular situation: in the classroom, in conversation, in a specific social setting, and on television. Loosely following the ethnographic principles used by folklorists and anthropologists, the groups formulated research questions, devised research methods and instruments, carried out their studies, analyzed their data, and compiled their findings in essays which also offered their interpretations of the trends they had discerned in their data.

In individually produced essays, they next evaluated some aspect of doing fieldwork or writing collaboratively. And in the English 110 sections, each student developed or refined one entry from her "Reader-Response Journal" to produce a fourth paper that argued for some opinion relevant to the reading on the basis of personal experience and/or observation. The final exam required each person to
discuss one discovery she had made about writing, the process or the product, during her completion of the quarter's assignments.

I was delighted with and impressed by the work that the students in the "gender issues" course produced. They were energetic and enthusiastic in our discussions and as they completed class activities. They poured great effort into their invention, drafting, and revision. They worked effectively as teams on their collaborative projects. Their essays became increasingly sophisticated in their analysis. As the quarter progressed, they took on a greater sense of authority in the classroom because they were sharing real discoveries with me and with their classmates. And at the end of the term, many of them assured me that they planned to continue questioning received opinions, challenging standard notions, and conceiving of the means to any change they might see as necessary—something I regarded as a strong sign of their maturation as writers and as thinkers.

The personal experience papers that the "gender issues" students produced fascinated me. Many students wrote about sports-related experiences from their childhoods, exploring the frustrations they felt if they were or were not interested in "appropriate" games—a number of female students described the struggle to gain the acceptance of the boys on the Little League teams they had insisted on joining; an equal number of male students wrote about the grudging respect they gradually came to accord girls who had found their way onto the baseball field or basketball court—or they wrote about coping with their fathers' disappointment at their failure to show an enthusiasm for their dads' preferred sports. Other family issues
surfaced, as well: one female student wrote movingly about her mother’s efforts to master “manly” duties after she and her mom were abandoned by her father. And another young woman wrote about the discrimination she felt her dad to be guilty of—she became an outspoken, take-charge kind of person, she said, because she continually had to rebel against her father’s automatically giving her brothers more freedom simply because they are male.

In one of my all-time favorite student essays, another student, Jason H., asked, “Can You Take a Date Fishing?” Discussing his senior year of high school, Jason wrote:

For three straight years every [student council] office was held by a female, even though the [school] population was dominated by males sixty percent to forty percent. This year, [the men] decided to vote straight ticket, meaning guys voted for guys. In doing so, we figured that we would have an easy victory, but...none of our candidates won.... What could have happened? With all of us asking questions, a rumor began to float around that the faculty had thrown the election, because the males weren’t responsible enough.

With this development, according to Jason’s account, the males and females of the class became “enemies.” But inexplicably, at the peak of the controversy, Jason decided he simply had to ask out Michelle, the class president, who had taken to wearing a button that said, “Don’t Give In To Guy-Pressure.” He thusly explains his dilemma:

This meant that she was involved in the women’s part of the dispute, and they said, If the guys would have won, this incident would never have happened, but since we did they were just jealous. [Never having experienced] anything like this before, I automatically assumed that this was an equality issue. Because she was involved with it, I considered her a Radical Feminist.
Jason reasoned that as a “Radical Feminist,” Michelle “...wouldn’t want me to act in the traditional manner. Meaning that I wouldn’t open the door for her, I wouldn’t walk her to her house door, and I definitely wouldn’t take her out to nice restaurant and movie. To me those were traditional things that I couldn’t do. I thought for us to get along, I must treat her like one of the guys.” He decides to take her to the marina for a little fishing—with predictably disastrous consequences. Concluding the paper, he ruminates on what he has been through:

That night after the date was over, I decided to finish up some homework. I had to write a journal over what I [had done that] weekend. The only thing that came to mind was Michelle.... I found myself writing about what a jerk I [had been]. I [had] treated her as if she was one of the guys, because I didn’t understand what her values and beliefs were. I didn’t know what she was really like—a girl who just believed in something. I acted in the same manner as faculty, when they assumed that the males of our class were not responsible. I was just as bad as they were. I judged her image, not her values.... I stereotyped her. [But] the next time I judge [someone], I’m going to use facts to make my theory about [that] person. I’m not going to assume anything.

Jason’s apparently sincere engagement with his narrative and his sense of discovery were quite typical—these qualities were in evidence in most of the essays that the “gender issues” students completed. (Of course, it is important to look at the narratives produced by Jason and his classmates in context. There is the distinct possibility that they correctly discerned their teacher to be a supporter of women’s rights and therefore tried to please her by expressing what they would consider feminist sentiments. But it is also important to note that I made every effort to
assure them I was always in the process of evaluating my positions on gender issues and would not be judging them on their values. Moreover, it is important to note that while they were working on these narratives the students seemed genuinely to be questioning themselves and their attitudes. When they gathered in peer responding groups, and to talk before and after class, they appeared to be openly debating their prior and current stances on the situations they had chosen to recall in their papers.)

Just as interesting were the collaborative research papers that the “gender issues students” wrote. Jason’s group set out to determine how gender functions in television sitcoms that focus on the family, since these shows “are able to state a moral and resolve a problem that relates to it”; in their final analysis, they compellingly argued that “the mother and father figures affect what the moral is and how it is resolved.”

Another group, assigned to consider gender roles in the classroom, decided to test the persistent stereotype that men are aggressive and women are passive. They concluded, “These stereotypes do not always hold true.... In certain areas these traditional roles are completely reversed.... Our research reflects that...women are more aggressive when it comes to academics.” This is not an earth-shattering claim—but the writers of these statements made them in earnest, after conducting research in which they were truly probing; they were not making a token effort at studying their subject or looking for easy answers. Most impressive in their essay was their attention to detail. For instance, as they observed each other’s classes,
they noticed not only that the female students asked more questions, but also that the women asked different kinds of questions: “We noticed that men ask [really] drawn out questions as if to say they understand but they just want clarification. Whereas if a female has a problem [she] will ask a very direct question or just simply state that [she] does not understand.” They also attempted to account for the patterns they observed: “We felt women were less self-conscious because they do not have to keep the macho image men do…. It may be hard for men to realize that sometimes their insecurities about looking lost or confused will get in the way of [their] actually getting their questions answered.”

The papers in which these classes analyzed either the fieldwork process or the collaborative process were similar: the students were able to generalize about problems they encountered or successes they enjoyed, and they were able to theorize about the causes of their difficulties or their triumphs; they knew to support their theories and generalizations with examples from the activities they had recently completed. And this prepared each of them well to debate a particular “gender issue” in the final persuasive essay of the term.

At about the same time that I began focusing my first-year writing course on gender issues, I learned that the idea of having students study political matters was a controversial one. Compositionists around the country began debating the merits and problems of bringing social issues to the forefront of the writing classroom, largely due to attention-getting developments at the University of Texas (UT). Around 1990, UT’s English Policy Committee voted to focus its introductory
writing class on race and gender. The course was to be called “Writing About Difference,” and its students would read and write about essays collected in a text titled *Racism and Sexism*. Maxine Hairston, who became the leading opponent of the “Writing About Difference” course, chronicled the controversy for UT’s alumni publication, *Texas Alcalde*; her article, titled “The Reasons Why Not,” explained that advocates of the proposed class felt that “[student] evaluations [of first-year English] would improve if the course were focused on substantial issues in our society” and that “every freshman would benefit by reading and writing about the problems of racism and sexism in our society” (12).

The proposal for UT’s race and gender course was initially passed, despite the opposition of some English department faculty who feared that students in the class would not be exposed to a balanced presentation of the issues. Ultimately, the decision was deferred for a year, and the course proposal was revised to include a wider variety of readings; it then gained the approval of a strong majority of the English faculty. This second passing of the proposed course prompted heated discussion across the Texas campus (with one dean threatening to have his college institute its own separate freshman writing course) and sparked national debate among teachers of English.

In “The Reason Why Not” (and later, in an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, “Required Writing Courses Should Not Focus on Politically Charged Social Issues”), Hairston explained at length her objections to UT’s race and gender syllabus. In order to teach students to write, she said, a required writing
course should "show students how to use writing to explore ideas"—"through writing they can find out what they think and put their ideas into a form that allows those ideas to be tested and examined" (13). As well, the course should "show students how to develop and refine their ideas through writing a series of drafts and revisions" and ultimately "help students become confident writers who know how to express their ideas logically and clearly in a way that commands attention and respect" (13). For numerous reasons, Hairston asserted, a beginning writing course centered on social issues could not accomplish these goals.

First, she wrote, such a course is unsound from an instructional point of view: "Students develop best as writers when they can write about something they care about and want to know more about.... Only then...will they be motivated to invest real effort in their work. Few students will do their best when they are compelled to write on a topic that they feel is politically charged and about which they feel uninformed..." (13). In Hairston's view, "intellectual growth and diversity in a writing course comes from each student's investigating and writing about a topic that is congenial to him or her, sharing that writing with others, and being exposed to other people's ideas in the process.... As they write about [their varied interests], they develop their individual knowledge and expertise, but they also learn about each other" (13).

Hairston was also concerned that centering the first-year composition course on social issues would increase students' writing anxiety: "young people develop best as writers when teachers... create a low-risk environment that encourages
students to take chances”; asking “novice writers” to delve into political matters might well cause them to see the writing classroom as “an extremely high-risk situation” and therefore could cause them to “freeze.” New to the college environment, students are “apprehensive about their grades” and are “nervously test[ing] their teachers to see what they are supposed to say”; first-year writers generally “will venture opinions only timidly” and so might be “particularly reluctant to express their opinions in a political environment, especially if they...pick up signals that their instructors might not agree with their views.” In short, Hairston feared that a political orientation in the freshman-writing classroom would create a kind of tension under which “creative impulses [would] fade” and “students [would] not think critically or write honestly” (13).

After voicing instructional objections to shaping introductory composition courses around politics, Hairston tendered ethical objections. “Turning a required freshman writing course into one on racism and sexism, or any other complex and controversial social issue,” she argued, would “seriously [encroach] on the academic freedom of those who must take the course.... Mandating political content that students must pass in order to graduate severely limits their freedom of expression”... (13). Hairston claimed that the beginning writing course featuring political content would “work to subvert the students’ integrity at the very beginning of their college careers,” as “[forcing them] to write on controversial topics in a high-risk situation” keeps them from “explor[ing] and test[ing] their own ideas”; under such circumstances, she claimed, they instead “opt for survival over honesty”
and "give the instructor what they think he or she wants to hear" (13). This then teaches them a "chilling lesson" in their first semester, Hairston wrote: "Hypocrisy pays. Don't try to think for yourself" (13).

I was intrigued by Hairston's assessments, for my first-year students had embraced the chance to explore political subjects and had felt that they did indeed develop as writers as a result of their examining gender issues in their papers for the term. In fact, their behavior and their work contradicted virtually every argument Hairston asserted in "The Reasons Why Not."

If the students did not particularly care about gender issues, and/or did not feel especially informed about such matters, as they entered my class, they quickly became interested in them: early class activities asking them to think about their life histories showed them that they were not, in fact, uninformed on the subject—that everyone in our culture is to some degree affected by the distinctions we have traditionally drawn between the sexes. Their sense that they were thinking about important matters for the first time did not hamper their work but fueled it: they were "motivated to invest real effort in their work" and did find "politically charged" topics "congenial" precisely because they had not written on such subjects before and had not realized that they do have "individual expertise" on social issues by virtue of their upbringings and their personal experiences. And as they read and commented on each other's papers—sometimes challenging, sometimes agreeing with one another—they did deepen and refine their knowledge of and opinions on the matters they had variously explored. As they compared their views and the
experiences upon which those views were based, they learned how to build consensus and how to be resistant critical thinkers, how to defend a position and how to acknowledge alternative interpretations or beliefs.

Moreover, the students who worked through the “gender issues” syllabus did not seem to perceive our classroom as a “high-risk situation”; rather, they appeared to see it as a place where they were free to test their burgeoning political opinions. From the outset of the course, it was clear that most class members were venturing into new territory—that few students had been asked to examine in depth the impact gender roles have on what we think and do. This fact did not cause students to “freeze,” however; instead, it freed them: if everyone was in the process of formulating his or her views, everyone was safe to express and revise what he or she was currently thinking. Indeed, everyone benefited from voicing his or her developing ideas, as this forced all listeners to reevaluate and bolster their own arguments. “Creative impulses” did not “fade” but were stimulated; honesty was encouraged rather than discouraged because anyone who shared with the others what he or she had seen or done or felt was helping every other member of the class to articulate his or her own belief system.

In working through my strong response to Hairston’s arguments against a political orientation for freshman composition, I began to see how great a role narrative had come to play in my course. When I began teaching critical writing, I thought of the personal-experience paper as a “warm-up” assignment that would serve to get students started with the business of college writing. I saw it as
something that would develop the kinds of descriptive skills they would need to succeed in the “real” work of the course, argumentative or persuasive writing.

Following the lead of the textbook my fellow T.A.s and I had been instructed to use, I asked my classes to write about a significant experience—any significant experience—but I did not have my students spend a great deal of time explicitly analyzing whatever they chose to recount. I instead emphasized with them the techniques that would help them evoke vivid images and strong feelings for their readers. The papers that received the highest praise were the ones that most subtly conveyed the writers’ impressions of the stories’ meanings.

But as I did more and more coursework in folklore, I began to see the narrative assignment in a different light. In studying the work of such folklorists as Sandra Stahl and Richard Bauman, I began to understand that personal-experience stories are not entirely distinct from those writings in which authors assert and support a position or thesis. As Stahl has written,

> The personal narrative...represents a segment of the teller's personal system of ethics. The storyteller's own values influence the perception of experience, encourage the casting of the incident in a story form, and prompt the repetition of the story in various contexts.... In effect, the narrator [projects and] tests personal values—practical, moral, social, aesthetic—with every story repetition. Existentially, the personal experience narrator not only acts or experiences but “thinks about” [her] action, evaluates it, learns from it, and tells the story—not to express [her] values but to build them, to create them, to remake them each time [she] tells [her] stories. (“Stories” 270-274)

In essence, I came to see, the narrator of a personal-experience story asserts an interpretation of something that has happened to her (or something that she has
witnessed and reacted to), and she attempts to persuade her audience that her interpretation is a valid one. And through her interaction with her listeners, she may even reshape her story and draw new conclusions about its significance.

Not only did I start to recognize that narrative writing contains elements of critical writing, but I also began to see that critical writing contains elements of narrative. Obviously, personal anecdotes sometimes serve as evidence for the claims that persuasive writers attempt to support. But even when the author of a critical essay makes no reference to herself, she is writing about her own experiences—she is, in effect, taking us through her examination of her material and explaining how she has read it. There is an implied narrative in every piece of persuasive writing, just as there is an implied argument in every personal narrative.

Considering the fact that my "gender issues" class had faded to fall into the traps Maxine Hairston anticipated for such courses made me realize that I had incorporated the notion that "narrative is argument, and argument is narrative" into my approach to the teaching of first-year composition. My course on "The Politics of Gender" had continually referred the students back to their own experiences—had, in fact, made their experiences the central "texts" of the class.

The diagnostic essay, calling for a brief consideration of "the most important difference between men and women," gave the students the opportunity to begin examining their beliefs about the different genders; it led them to identify notable stereotypes of men and women, to point out "gender problems," and to raise questions about the complexity of male-female dynamics. This activity prepared
them to start re-viewing and re-casting their own past experiences. In working on their first substantial writing assignment—the paper explicitly labeled “personal-experience narrative”—they were working within the context of the views they and their classmates had expressed in our early, wide-ranging discussions. This prompted some to write about situations in which they had been the victims or practitioners of gender discrimination, and they were for the first time considering, in an organized and detailed fashion, why the practices of which they were victims (or practitioners) were unfair. Others were moved to write about situations that raised (what were for them) more subtle gender issues, and issues they claimed they were seeing for the first time. In both cases, it appeared that the students came to their revelations about their own encounters with gender issues because they had begun to explore such matters in the diagnostic essay and in the class’s talks about the broad “themes” everyone had identified in completing that introductory assignment.

For the rest of the term, the students continued to develop through narrative discourse their thinking on gender issues—and their understandings of their beliefs, ethics, values, and identities: in a sense, their “gender ethnographies” were narratives of their research experiences and the process by which they analyzed the information they had collected. Likewise, they developed compelling claims about either fieldwork or collaborative writing by exploring in narrative form what they had seen and done during their group work for Project 2. And they were able to evaluate quite astutely in their final exams some of their own writing problems and
achievements by charting the courses of their recent writing experiences. Finally, they employed the narration of relevant personal experiences in accounting for their responses to their readings and formulating their own persuasive theses.

As I reviewed the way in which I had set up my "gender issues" course, I concluded that a focus on the students' own experiences first of all prevented them from feeling that they had to discern and adopt the views of the teacher. It also instilled confidence in them by establishing them as budding authorities on a potentially intimidating subject. And, most importantly, it made apparent to them the mechanics of critical thinking and writing.

Armed with these conclusions, I wrote my dissertation prospectus on the value of teaching beginning college students to approach narrative writing as critical writing, and vice versa. And after moving to Nashville to teach composition at Belmont University, I sought to test and refine the thinking that had informed my "gender issues" syllabus. At Belmont, I devised an assignment sequence for a first-year writing course that would in various ways consider "The Politics of Popular Culture," in order to determine that a variety of subjects could be broached in the manner by which my OSU students had investigated gender.

The diagnostic essay for the popular culture course asked each of the students to describe and analyze a time when she was affected, positively or negatively, by a television show or a movie that she had seen. This first-day writing set the class up to define popular culture and to discuss the ways in which it both reflects and shapes the values and beliefs of our society. The students in the popular
culture course were usually being asked to consider movies and TV seriously and in some depth for the first time, so here, as in the gender issues course, they tended to become excited about their topics and put a great deal of thought and energy into their work on the subject.

After we discuss their responses to the diagnostic essay prompt, the members of the class are ready to begin their work on their first major project for the semester, a depiction and evaluation of a significant personal experience that is some way related to popular culture. The students are free to expand what they have written for the diagnostic essay, but they are also free to focus on something other than television or film—they can consider how they have been affected by music, advertising, toys, fashion, a recent fad or trend. In any case, it is paramount that we begin with such an assignment, for in our work on this project, we establish concepts and a vocabulary with which we can later discuss critical writing.

As the students are beginning their work on Project 1, I very deliberately encourage one particular approach to the paper: I tell them to construct first a description of the incident and second an analysis of the event's significance, explaining that this mirrors the organizational strategy of the typical oral narrative concerning personal experience. I then draw for my students the distinction between descriptive and evaluative language; as well, I ask them to consider how and why we tell one another stories about our lives.

Inviting them to think about their daily interactions with their friends and families as I go along. I prompt them to think about the ways that they shape the
narratives which inform their everyday conversations to achieve certain effects, carefully choosing their details and their words. I also ask them to think about the fact that they usually conclude their tales of their experiences with a statement or two that directly addresses the "point" of the story. When we discuss with others the noteworthy things that happen to us, I say, we pack our descriptions of our events with pieces of evidence that will support the conclusions we will draw as we finish our narratives. We seek to evoke for our audiences vivid portraits of what has happened to us, and we work to justify to our listeners our "readings" of those events.

This approach to the initial assignment prepares us to discuss the workings of thesis-and-support writing, as in the rest of the semester's assignments the students tackle the critical analysis of various popular-culture "texts." Their second assignment requires the students to gather a number of magazine advertisements for similar goods or services; they are charged with identifying patterns in the advertisements to characterize the marketing of the products they have chosen to study.

As they prepare to organize their thoughts on their ads, I explain that in this paper they will be performing the same tasks that they were in their work on the first paper; they will simply be arranging their material differently (and eliminating first-person references from their discourse). Now, I tell them, they will begin with their evaluations and follow up with carefully chosen words and images that account for and validate the conclusions they have drawn. Critical writing, I suggest, turns
narrative writing upside down, formally speaking (that is, in form); nonetheless, the
two modes of discourse require virtually identical types of thinking. I sometimes
expand on this idea by drawing an analogy to mathematics: I suggest that
argumentation is the inverse or the reciprocal of narration.

With the third and fourth assignments for the semester, I work to reinforce
the notion that argumentative writing is, in a sense, a form of narrative writing.
These two essays, which are linked to one another by topic, require the students to
do various types of research into some popular-culture phenomenon: Project Three
demands original research, while Project Four calls for secondary research. Project
Four is either a revised and expanded version of Project Three, or it serves as a
companion-piece to Project Three. For example, Project Three might be an
ethnographic study of Nashville coffeehouses which deals exclusively with the
student’s first-hand observations of and interviews with those who are regular
members of the culture; Project Four would contain the student’s description and
evaluation of the community she studied, but it would incorporate others’ research
as well: she would enhance her depiction and interpretation of the coffeehouse
phenomenon by citing books and/or articles on the same subject. Meanwhile,
another student might choose to satisfy the requirements for Project Three by doing
a close reading of a particular musician’s song lyrics to determine what themes the
singer tends to address; for Project Four, this student might produce an entirely new
paper that compiles the public’s responses to that same musician’s work and
indicates how various critics have received the singer’s body of work.
When the students present and interpret the information they gather on the subjects of Projects Three and Four, I ask them to consider the notion that they are implicitly telling the story of finding and analyzing their material. Once again, I point out, they are evaluating their personal experiences—in this case, their experiences with what they have observed or read—and producing purposefully crafted descriptions of the things upon which their assessments are based. In short, I continuously argue that there is an implied narrative to any research paper.

I have continually been impressed with the work the students have produced in my narrative-oriented course on popular culture, so I would like to cite a few of their more entertaining and thoughtful papers. I have received any number of insightful personal-experience narratives: for example, one woman explored the deep confusion and frustration she felt as a child when her parents attempted to squelch her determined interest in "boys' toys"; another student ruefully illustrated the pitfalls of blindly following a trend in a comic tale of the ridicule he faced on the junior-high school playground when he meticulously dressed himself after the fashion of a popular television character.

The work on the second assignment has been equally interesting and perceptive: one person recently looked at the clothing advertisements that fill the pages of Seventeen, Sassy, and YM, convincingly arguing that these ads subtly but consistently portray girls as "art objects" that exist primarily to be judged and admired by males. Another compelling project concerned ads for candy and chewing gum; its author discerned that companies selling Bubble Yum and the like
encourage children to see the consumption of such products as a form of rebellion against their "uncool" parents.

The kind of work with which the students have concluded the semester is well-represented by a research project whose author, Jacquie, watched a variety of current sitcoms and recent films and reached the following conclusions:

The mentally ill have been stigmatized for many centuries in many cultures. In the past, films about mad scientists and psychotic killers have proven commercially successful. This success occurred at a time when undergoing psychological treatment was a social death sentence. Today, attending a therapy session is a common activity. Celebrities, students, singles and families all unashamedly seek expert advice. Therapy has so thoroughly penetrated our lives that it has become a frequent feature in popular culture.

In the doctor/patient relationship, the doctor is expected to be the pillar of rationality. This stereotype is taken into consideration as psychological professionals are portrayed in the media. But generally, the doctor is shown in one of two lights—as a domineering, insensitive snob who thrives on power and prestige, or as an emotionally unstable individual who cannot conquer his or her own problems but nonetheless attempts to aid others in solving theirs.

My popular culture students have time and again produced incisive pieces of criticism like Jacquie's, and I believe this is in part due to the fact that I ask them to approach their work as skilled narrators and analysts of narrative. The success of these students encourages me to continue pursuing a means of making narrative assignments the "rule" rather than the "exception" in the composition classroom.

In the discussion that follows, I will investigate how the students in my first-year composition classes approached political issues with an emphasis on personal-experience narrative to explore "The Politics of Gender" or "The Politics of Popular
Culture." I ultimately argue that it is not necessary to view personal or expressive writing as different from (and inferior to) academic or argumentative writing. My work with my students, along with the study of folklore, has led me to believe that critical writing can be approached through narrative writing—if not as narrative writing—thus suggesting some new directions for the teaching of composition.
CHAPTER 2

A FOLKLOREST READS COMPOSITION;
A COMPOSITIONIST READS FOLKLORE

Introduction

Folkloristics and composition studies have a great deal in common as disciplines. Among other things, both concern themselves with the means by which people come to identify their beliefs and their values, and both concern themselves with the ways that people communicate those beliefs and values. The two disciplines center on the production, transmission, and reception of information, and they share an interest in the social and cultural conventions that govern the sharing of knowledge. Yet the work done by the scholars in each of these areas for the most part goes unrecognized by those in the other. Thus, one of my goals in this dissertation is the initiation of a dialogue between composition and folkloristics.

In the chapter that follows, I seek to begin this discussion by examining the perspectives of both folkloristics and composition on the personal narrative. My
reading in the ongoing research of the two disciplines has shown me that members of both professions see the personal experience story as a *topos* for personal identity and for worldview. This has led me to believe that we might derive from this *topos* a pedagogy that can clarify the beginning composition student's understanding of the critical thinking/critical writing process.

More specifically, this chapter will assert the following claims, drawing on the work of prominent compositionists and folklorists whose studies are complementary to one another:

1. Narration is a critical enterprise: the storyteller who verbally renders a personal experience is not merely describing an event but building an argument.

2. Argumentation is a narrative enterprise: the creator of persuasive discourse is tells the story of her arriving at her conclusions on a particular subject. She describes the process by which she arrived at her position, drawing on her own experiences or observations and those of others—which she makes her own as she listens or reads.

3. One comes to her most comprehensive understandings of her experiences and their significance by sharing them with others. Our interactions with our audiences shape our perceptions of the things that have happened to us; working for and with
our listeners shapes what we think has happened, and it determines what we believe is important about what we decide has happened.

4. Discussing the above matters with beginning composition students as they enter college can help them understand more readily how they make sense of their lives and their surroundings. Such discussion aids in preparing them for the kinds of analytical writing that are required of them as they move through the university.

5. The best kind of writing classroom will be a place which invites students to be "performers" (in folkloristics' use of this term)—it will replicate the kinds of situations in which people more naturally and spontaneously share and evaluate their experiences and their value systems.

In my view, it is a "side-by-side" examination of the research into the personal narrative by both folkloristics and composition that brings these five arguments sharply into focus. On its own, the work of each field yields rich insights into how we learn, how we perceive the world, and how we develop our values and beliefs: composition stresses the role that language plays in our apprehension of our surroundings and deems stories to be a means toward self-understanding; folkloristics examines the ways in which telling tales of our experiences serves not merely to document events but to give coherence and meaning to them. But taken together, the theories of the two fields clarify and enhance one another, to yield useful ideas for the writing classroom, where teachers have long struggled to
determine what to require of their students. If viewed in light of one another, composition and folkloristics patently suggest that a first-year curriculum in which narrative assignments are pervasive can lead to students' acquiring a solid and intricate understanding of the critical reading and writing processes. When folklorists start paying attention to the literature on incorporating narrative into first-year writing programs, when we read the debates among composition scholars with an ear for how narratives frame personal experience and make it coherent, we are in a better position to design substantive courses in writing and rhetoric, especially at the first-year level.

Subjective and Transactional Rhetoric

The composition theorists who subscribe to what James Berlin broadly terms "subjective rhetoric" and "transactional rhetoric" operate from premises that are very similar to those of many folklorists who study the personal narrative. Among the researchers in the two disciplines are compositionists and folklorists who see language as socially determined and investigate the role language plays in our constructions of our experiences and our perceptions of reality. The arguments formulated by the different researchers in these two fields strongly substantiate one another and suggest new directions for the teaching of writing.

As Berlin indicates in Rhetoric and Reality, subjective rhetoric "locates reality within the individual, the lone agent acting apart from the material or social realms" (139). He proposes that a pervasive form of subjective rhetoric is found "in a group of diverse approaches commonly called expressionistic"; these approaches
share "the conviction that reality is a personal and private construct," that "truth is always discovered within, through an internal glimpse, an examination of the private inner world" (145).

Counted among the expressivists are those who endorse the idea of "reality as arising out of the interaction of the private vision of the individual and the language used to express that vision," and "in this view language does not simply record the private vision but becomes involved in shaping it. The unique inner glimpse of the individual is still primary, but language becomes an element in its nurturing" (146). Of relevance here are the approaches to writing instruction advocated first in the sixties and seventies and later, through the present, by such teachers as Donald Murray—who a few years ago in College English contended that "All Writing is Autobiography"—along with others whose pedagogy emphasizes the place of language in the shaping of the self: Ken Macrorie, William Coles, Peter Elbow.

Defining transactional rhetoric, Berlin says, "Transaction rhetoric does not locate reality in some empirically verifiable external phenomenon (sense impression or the quantifiable) or within some realm apart from the external (ideas or vision). It instead discovers reality in the interaction of the features of the rhetorical process itself—in the interaction of material reality, writer, audience, and language" (155). Relevant to my study is one particular kind of transactional rhetoric, the epistemic. The epistemic view holds that rhetoric involves not only the transmission but also
the generation of knowledge; rhetoric exists not merely so that truth may be communicated—it exists so truth may be discovered.

Drawing on communication theory, Berlin explains that "the epistemic position implies that knowledge is not discovered by reason alone, that cognitive and affective processes are not separate, that intersubjectivity is a condition of all knowledge, and that the contact of minds affects knowledge." In other words, "epistemology is rhetorical, is itself a social construct" (165).

Directly opposing the positivistic contention that reality is empirical and language simply reports what is determined outside its domain, the epistemic view is that all reality, all knowledge—including the empirical—is a linguistic construct; "meaning emerges not from objective, disinterested investigation, but from individuals engaging in rhetorical discourse in discourse communities—groups organized around the discussion of particular matters in particular ways," and "knowledge, then, is a matter of mutual agreement appearing as the product of the rhetorical activity, the discussion, of a given discourse community" (166).

One compositionist whose pedagogy is grounded in epistemic concerns is Ann Berthoff, who in "The Problem of Problem Solving" argues that education, including the teaching of writing, is a political act. As teachers of writing, she says, we must ask ourselves, "Can we change the social context in which English composition is taught by the way we teach English composition?" (240). Writing must be taught, she argues, so that it is involved in students' personal and social lives. Furthermore, students must be regarded as shapers of their personal and
social environments—language users who find and create forms of experience through language. They must be regarded as active agents who shape the world in which they live, calling on language to structure new social arrangements—not simply personal ones divorced from the larger social context. Later, in "From Problem-Solving to a Theory of Imagination," Berthoff stresses that reality is not "something out there," but the product of a dialectic involving observer and observed, and the agency of mediation is language. "Language builds the modern world" (646), Berthoff concludes, and "rhetoric reminds us that the function of language is not only to name but also to formulate and transform—to give form to feeling, cogency to argument, shape to memory" (647). Folklorists who also argue that language constitutes and transforms experience complement Berthoff's ideas, along with those of other compositionists whose theories and pedagogies have at their foundation an epistemic view of rhetoric: Kenneth Bruffee, Andrea Lunsford, David Bartholomae.

"Composition Wars"—Let's Call the Whole Thing Off

For some time now, composition instructors at the college level have debated the usefulness of narrative to the teaching of critical writing. Some advocates favor the use of narrative writing assignments for its power to engage students with the composing process. Those who find themselves in this camp take the position expressed by Mary Nicolini in a 1994 English Journal article titled "Stories Can Save Us: A Defense of Narrative Writing": "After experiencing
success with their personal narratives, students view writing as less of a chore, less intimidating, and something at which they can be successful.... When later they write about Beowulf and Macbeth and the Romantic poets, they make the transition into analytical expository writing more comfortably" (58). Similarly, in the book *Active Voice: A Writing Program Across the Curriculum*, James Moffett writes, "Narrative becomes exposition by gradual shifts, and this continuous bridging between abstraction levels needs to be followed in some way, sometimes as an order of writing and sometimes merely as a focus of awareness for teacher and student" (72).

Those who favor the exclusion of narrative from the college writing classroom do so for a variety of reasons. Thomas Newkirk, comments on this rather curious phenomenon when he notes,

> There is a strange schizophrenia about narrative writing in English departments. On the one hand, they are built upon the narrative . . . . Yet in writing classes there is the sense that narratives are relatively easy to write and academically suspect”; prevalent is the notion that argumentation is the “more advanced and sophisticated” form of discourse. (Performance 20).

In considering this matter, I have come to agree with Andrea Lunsford, who suggests that “the divorce of personal experience and argument . . . must be related to the old mind/body split and the western tradition’s suspicion of anything that didn’t count as completely rational” (personal correspondence, 24 April 2000).

Education has, after all, been influenced for centuries by the Cartesian model of knowledge, in which “to know is to ‘see’” and “knowledge is information pressed
upon the individual by some outside force” (Bruffee 405). In other words, the commonplace in the profession that the personal is secondary to argument or even irrelevant is a belief based on traditional ideas connected with Enlightenment notions of rationality objectivity and so-called common sense.

Like Andrea Lunsford and her collaborator Lisa Ede, Kenneth Bruffee recognizes the social dimension of learning and the integration of thought (mind) and feeling (body); the views articulated all three of these scholars belie the flaws in the Cartesian model. As Bruffee argues in his attempt to establish a place for collaboration in the contemporary English curriculum,

If we accept the premise that knowledge is an artifact created by a community of knowledgeable peers constituted by the language of that community, and that learning is a social and not an individual process, then to learn is not to assimilate information and improve our mental eyesight. To learn is to work collaboratively to establish and maintain knowledge among a community of knowledgeable peers through the process Richard Rorty calls ‘socially justifying belief.’ We socially justify belief when we explain to others why one way of understanding how the world hangs together seems to us preferable to other ways of understanding it. (405)

He goes on to claim,

We establish knowledge or justify belief collaboratively by challenging each other’s biases and presuppositions; by negotiating collectively toward new paradigms of perception, thought, feeling, and expression; and by joining larger, more experienced communities of knowledgeable peers through assenting to those communities’ interests, values, language, and paradigms of perception and thought. (405)

Throughout the body of his work, Bruffee makes statements on the nature of collaboration resoundingly echo those of numerous folklorists who concern
themselves with the nature of personal experience narrative (and with the nature of folk groups). While he does not use the vocabulary and framework of folkloristics, Bruffee and other social constructionists implicitly acknowledge the complex interaction of thought and feeling, mind and body, idea and intuition.

But there are still other challenges to expressivism, the pedagogical approach that makes the most pronounced use of personal narrative writing. According to Newkirk, "leftist advocates of cultural studies" fear that expressivism fosters an unhealthy individualism and can lead to isolation, alienation, solipsism, or even "an accommodation to the status quo" (Performance 88-89). Other critiques of expressivist pedagogy suggest that it contains an element of deception. In Fragments of Rationality, Lester Faigley writes, "The freedom students are given in some classes to choose and adapt autobiographical assignments hides the fact that these same students will be judged by the teachers' unstated assumptions about subjectivity and that every act of writing they perform occurs within complex relations of power" (128). Faigley also criticizes personal assignments on the grounds that "[asking] students to write authentically about the self assumes that a unified consciousness can be laid out on the page" (87).

In The Performance of Self in Student Writing, Newkirk summarizes the "war" between the expressivists who favor personal writing and the postmodernists who advocate a "cultural studies" approach to the teaching of writing. Newkirk answers the postmodernists' challenges to expressivism, and he ultimately proposes one way of resolving the conflict between the two camps: "us[ing] Jamesian
pragmatism...to justify forms of personal writing in terms of their consequences for student development" (85).

As Newkirk explains, the expressivist position finds some of its strongest supporters in the prominent compositionists Donald Murray and Peter Elbow. These theorists, among other expressivists, understand the self as knowable and expressible, and they articulate writing pedagogies that construe personal writing as integral to self-knowledge. Murray and Elbow, like their fellow advocates of expressivism, have been essential to the formulation of writing pedagogies that respect students and their stories. These theorists accept students' narrative accounts of self and world, implicitly understanding the value of personal stories in the qualities of their assignments and their responses to those assignments. It is Newkirk's opinion that recent assaults on the integrity of personal writing "[have] not been thoughtfully engaged" (85). In responding to the attacks on expressivist pedagogy, Newkirk offers an excellent model of precisely the kinds of engagement we need to be taking.

Newkirk's 1997 book understands narrative as one aspect of personal writing's "representation of the self" (1-10), that representation being more complex than many non-expressivist theorists acknowledge. For example, he applauds Donald Murray's notion of the self as "fundamentally changeable" and "eager to shed more than a skin," emphasizing that critics of expressivism fail to note the complexity of selves revealed in student personal writing. Newkirk states,

The critique of personal writing begins with a challenge to [the] romantic conception of 'self'—a coherent, stable, active 'essence' that
the individual, through an act of sincerity (or 'honesty'), can be represented in language. To the extent that a piece of discourse accurately represents this essence it is 'authentic.' Even the language itself, though obviously shared by others, is described as 'owned' by the writer. (86)

By showing how Murray is often challenged by the non-expressivists, Newkirk reveals a new complexity to both student personal writing and that student's representation of a growing, fallible, even fragmented self.

Newkirk quotes Donald Murray's book Crafting a Life: In Essay, Story, and Poem, to show how expressivists conceive of the self and view writing:

The fear of exposure by writing is a rational fear. But in the act of exposure, writers discover themselves. I meet myself on the page and after decades of writing have come to accept myself—I'd better—and in the process of writing I have learned who I am—and have found a person with whom I can live and work, a person I keep needing to rediscover. (Murray 3)

Newkirk's reading of Murray relies on an analysis of Murray's central metaphors.

Newkirk writes:

The root metaphors here—"exposure," "discovery," "found"—suggest a fixed individual essence, a secularized soul, hidden from the individual due to a timidity that prevents the full deployment of language. "Honest" writing allows for the reckoning and healing self-acceptance Murray describes. This "self" is revealed through language but not constituted by language because it exists (hidden) prior to the use of language. (86)

Newkirk says, "Murray seems to take the foundational view," which James Berlin, another critic of expressivism, describes as follows:

The existent is located within the individual subject. While the reality of the material, the social, and the linguistic are never denied,
they are considered significant only in so far as they serve the needs of the individual. All fulfill their true function only when being exploited in the interests of locating the individual's authentic nature. Writing can be seen as a paradigmatic instance of this activity. It is an art, a creative act in which the process—the discovery of the true self—is as important as the product—the self discovered and expressed. (Berlin, "Rhetoric and Ideology" 484).

Newkirk allows that Berlin's "is not an unfair representation of what appears to be the epistemological position Murray takes" but says that it "also seems a reductio ad absurdum that exposes the obvious problems with the position" (86).

No doubt, there would be problems for postmodernists in the concepts of "authentic nature" and "true self." And Newkirk articulates these problems in a series of provocative questions: "How can this self exist prior to language? Isn't the concept of self a cultural product? In what way is this self distinct if our only way of knowing it is through language with conventional meanings? How can we know that this self is 'exposed' honestly, that we're not lying or playing a role? Is honesty anything more than the feeling of being honest? If part of this self is the relatively inaccessible 'unconscious' how can we claim to fully present ourselves?" (Newkirk 86-87).

Newkirk reports that "according to postmodern critiques, the above problems with expressivist epistemological assumptions raise doubts about autobiographical writing" (87). But he also asserts that "the ease with which critics like Faigley have dismissed terms like 'self.' 'authenticity.' and 'individual' is startling"—these concepts "have played such a role in the stories we tell of human development that their utility (and limitations) need a more serious look" (87).
Newkirk then defends and complicates the notion of expressionist writing by explaining how an essay does not, in fact, ever show a unified, stable self, but in fact depends intrinsically on a change of perspective on character or self, a change that he has termed "the turn" (11-24). He finally contends that the answer lies in William James' "fruits not roots" approach, which shifts the question away from epistemology to a pragmatic look at consequences. He explains, "The test of this method is not in the 'truth' of the stories (the roots), but in their capacity to enable students to write with commitment and pleasure, and indirectly to foster values we view as ethical (the fruits)" (87).

Ultimately, however, even Newkirk's application of pragmatism to the writing classroom does not resolve completely the antagonism between expressivist pedagogy and cultural studies pedagogy. He writes that Faigley and Berlin sometimes dismiss expressivist terms and, by extension, all of expressivism, in precipitous ways. Yet he readily discounts Faigley's and Berlin's claims; moreover, like Faigley et al. he is willing to assert the ascendancy of one type of writing (the personal) over another (that which is based in communitarian values and collective social action).

Newkirk observes that many composition instructors shy away from asking their first-year classes to construct narratives about their experiences due to "the mismatch in worldviews that occurs when students present themselves in personal writing" (37). As academics trained to place a premium on living "the life of the mind," graduate teaching assistants and college professors have been taught to be
irritated by the sentimentality that often marks the stories produced by novice writers, Newkirk notes. In such papers, students tend to “construct a positive coherent ‘self’”; theirs is not “an aesthetic that prefers the postmodern image of the divided, fragmented self” (56). When they evaluate their encounters with people they greatly admire or incidents they see as life-altering, young authors are unambivalent and write with a lack of complexity; they tend to fall back on clichés and remark upon what is easily recognizable, offering conventional responses to familiar types of events. More often than not, their reliance on clichés and conventions in their personal-experience writing causes their teachers to see them as shallow, naïve, immature, unthinking, and/or unsophisticated (25-68).

But we commit a grave error, Newkirk says, if we reward only writing that we see as “fresh,” “distinctive,” “unique.” Writing that deals in “commonplaces” can actually be quite meaningful to beginning composition students, and when we dismiss it as trite or facile, we reject an opportunity to see where our young thinkers are developmentally and what matters to them. In fact, Newkirk points out, our students’ “unsophisticated” personal essays generally indicate what they have come to regard as “moral and socially useful behavior”; as well, their essays celebrate “qualities of character that we would endorse in [their] real-life activity” (34) and sometimes even serve as exhortations to their writers (46). Students’ “insights” into the significance of their experiences may not seem profound to us, but their assessments often represent flashes of new understanding on the part of these writers. And if these “new” ideas are expressed in shopworn ways, it is often
because the writers cannot find words that to them are adequate for the situation; they seek to reach their readers by relying on well-known sayings that convey recognizable sentiments.

Like Lad Tobin, Newkirk believes that the writing course must be viewed as an “open space” that is “big enough for a diversity of forms of self-representation” (106-107). In such a space, teachers can and should acknowledge the value in the sincere, emotional writing that students tend to produce when we ask them to consider their own experiences (56). Newkirk urges us to “read against the grain”—to “step outside our own aesthetic and appreciate papers which assume different and more direct conventions for emotional expression” (36).

"Appreciate" is the operative word here, however. While he does believe that students should be given opportunities to write about their personal experiences, Newkirk does not connect such writing to the other types of discourse that college students are called upon to produce. He asks that teachers allow the eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds who fill their classrooms to write like the teenagers they are; he argues that we should value the "insights" that come about when these young people describe their mentors and the memorable incidents of their lives, no matter how juvenile or pedestrian their judgments might seem to older, wiser readers, for these conclusions are reflections of what matters to adolescents, persons who are in the process of forming their intellectual and emotional outlooks on life. What Newkirk does not do is discuss ways of integrating personal writing with other forms of expository writing—he talks about narrative forms of writing as though they are to
be regarded as somehow separate from those forms that call for the author to consider her own views in light of the views of others, those that require the writer to enter into argument.

In my judgment, folkloristics' perspective on personal experience stories offers us an even better way to set aside the conflict that Newkirk tries to redress. I read in folklore studies' analysis of personal narrative a set of assertions which points the way toward a pedagogy that treats knowledge as both personally and socially constructed. Such pedagogy need not set personal writing aside from other types of discourse. Because folkloristics recognizes—indeed, emphasizes—the analytical nature of narrative and treats narrative as a form of argument, its theories can help the college composition instructor create a writing classroom which values the claims of teachers like Murray and Elbow even as it also values the claims of teachers like Faigley and Berlin.

**A Folkloristic Approach**

Taking a step further the argument that language constitutes experience, a contingent of prominent folklorists who have begun the ethnography of personal experience in the past thirty years contend that, in fact, it is the *story* that serves as the agency of mediation between observer and observed. Operating from this notion, I argue that the students’ written personal-experience narratives are marked by many of the same features that characterize oral personal-experience narrative and, in turn, that those written texts fulfill many of the same purposes and perform
many of the same functions that their oral counterparts do. As well, those written
texts, like their oral counterparts, are culturally coded and informed by the social
context in which they are constructed.

Below, I seek to represent the ideas of several folklorists whose theories
about oral personal-experience narrative are highly relevant to my students' responses to the popular culture and gender issues assignment sequences. I also intend for my discussion of these folklorists' work to indicate important correspondences between folklore theory and rhetorical theory, as I believe that an examination of the parallels can lead to a set of pedagogical recommendations that will point toward a rethinking of the status of narrative assignments in the first-year writing curriculum.

**Defining the Personal Narrative**

Among the first folklorists to establish the personal narrative as belonging to the domain of folklore, Sandra Stahl convincingly argues for its "traditionality" by pointing out that although its content is generally unique to its teller, it uses as its base such conventional aspects of storytelling as predictable form and evidence of personal and cultural stylization so as to serve certain conventional functions—often in certain conventional settings. Moreover, Stahl contends, we need to study the traditional styles, forms, and functions of these narratives, for in them are hidden the teller's goals, hopes, attitudes, and beliefs.
In an early article suggesting that folklorists take up the study of personal experience storytelling, she writes, "The personal narrative...represents a segment of the teller's personal system of ethics. The storyteller's own values influence the perception of experience, encourage the casting of the incident in story form, and prompt the repetition of the story in various contexts ("Stories" 270). "In effect," Stahl says, "the narrator [projects and] tests personal values—practical, moral, social, aesthetic—with every story repetition"; existentially, the personal experience narrator not only acts or experiences but 'thinks about' [her] action, evaluates it, learns from it, and tells the story—not only to express [her] values but to build them, to create them, to remake them each time [she] tells [her] stories" ("Stories" 274).

Refining her definition of the personal narrative for folklore in a book-length work, Stahl more precisely delineates the qualities of the genre: "The personal narrative is a prose narrative relating a personal experience; it is usually told in the first person, and its content is nontraditional”—meaning that its plot is idiosyncratic to the teller (Literary Folkloristics 12-13). More specifically, Stahl writes that "three features combine to define the personal narrative"; they are "1) dramatic narrative structure, 2) a consistently implied assertion that the narrative is true, and 3) the self-same identity of the teller and the story's main character" (Literary Folkloristics 14-15). In short, she says, "with personal narratives, the genre itself is the primary traditional aspect of the storytelling" (15).
With regard to the "truthfulness" of the personal narrative, Stahl points out, "it is necessary to distinguish between . . . accuracy and . . . credibility," for "the personal always involves some manipulation" of the facts at hand, first of all because "the experience is filtered through preexistent patterns even before it is articulated as a story, [patterns which] represent both personal and cultural conventions that serve to generalize actions and events into manageable perceptual units," and secondly because the "manipulation of the reality involved is for the sake of rhetoric—to persuade the listener toward an appreciation of the cultural truths represented by the story" (Literary Folkloristics 18). Thus, it is ultimately Stahl's contention that "the expression of personal values is the hidden agenda in any [personal experience] storytelling" (Literary Folkloristics 21). (She expresses this same idea quite poetically in the Prologue to her book: "The narrator of a personal experience story "knows who she is" and "explores who she is becoming"; her story is "imbued with new meaning each time she tells it" [Literary Folkloristics xi]).

Stahl does not see the narrative process as a solitary endeavor, though; she is greatly concerned with its social dimension as well. The storyteller who talks about something she has experienced does not conceive of the event and its importance on her own—rather, it is in voicing (and, perhaps, re-voicing) a narrative about the incident that the person finds the tale's significance: "For the teller and the listener, so much of what a personal narrative means is outside the narrative itself and inside the intangible memories and feelings engendered by the relationship between the teller and the listener and the teller's personal world" (Literary Folkloristics x).
The transaction here is not one-way, however; as the narrator learns of her own experience in telling her audience about what she has been through, the listener increases her understanding of the narrator, too: "When a person tells a personal narrative, [she] invites someone to know [her].... One gets to know someone else by sharing experience.... We 'know' others and assume they 'know' us when we believe we have shared a similar perception of a mutual experience. The knowledge one gains as a listener when personal narratives are told brings with it the sensation of intimacy, our feeling that the telling and listening are an exclusive exchange where we come close to seeing each other's reality. The successful teller of personal narratives engages the listener in an adventure—not simply the plot of a story, but rather the shared activity of exploring the teller's world, the teller's identity" (Literary Folkloristics x). The listener is active rather than passive as she takes in the teller's story: "...[T]he personal narrative is a dynamic genre. It requires that the listener discover the values or character traits the teller expresses through the story.... [T]he personal narrative tells a story which serves as an illustration of a theme, a value, or a character trait. Part of the listener's task is to formulate the question to which the story is an answer, to ask, 'What do I know about this person from hearing this story?' And the major clues provided the listener are found in the structure, form, and content of the stories themselves" (Literary Folkloristics 23).
Personal Narratives and "Personal Novels"

David Stanley builds on Stahl's work to draw a compelling connection between oral stories of personal experience and their literary replication. Stanley concerns himself with the study of folklore and fiction; in "The Personal Narrative and the Personal Novel: Folklore as Frame and Structure for Literature," he proposes to "show the close relationship between the hearing of personal narratives and the reading of personal novels" (109). In essence, he says, personal narratives are "the stories we tell each other about our everyday experiences, stories which center themselves in decision-making, conflict, ethical ambiguity, and danger, so that the personal narrative is more often than not a tale about the teller as much as it is about [her] experiences" (108). The personal novel is, according to Stanley, the personal narrative's literary counterpart: it is a novel that maintains a strictly limited first- or third-person point of view, concerns a single protagonist's experiences, and is "likely to be thematically concerned with maturing, with coping, with learning" (110). Even if they span short periods of narrative time, such works "tend to emphasize decisions, deliberations, and ethical questions" (110).

Elaborating on the idea that personal storytelling is a creative and dynamic process negotiated by a storyteller and her audience, Stanley argues that with the performance of either kind of personal narrative, oral or literary, a given narrator implicitly invites a given audience to participate in the evaluation of a recent or remote past experience. And, in fact, Stanley says, when we read a personal novel we are able to recognize and accept its invitation to evaluate the protagonist's
actions because we recognize and accept such invitations in our daily lives—we explain to one another the things that have happened to us in order to assign those experiences places in our histories and our senses of our selves. When one person describes a problematic situation to another, she is implicitly asking her listener to join her in weighing alternatives and making decisions. Or, if she has already acted on the matter, she is asking her listener to assess—and probably, to validate—a decision that she has previously made. In attempting to comply with this tacit request for evaluation, the listener is likely draw on her own related experiences.

From the reader of the personal novel, much the same is required: "At stake [in the literary work] is a process of implicit paradigmatic alternatives; the reader imagines alternatives of action and evaluation alike, enters into the world of the novel as if [she] were personally committed to the situation..." (Stanley 112). Like the audience for the oral narrative, the reader of the personal novel is likely to rely on comparable experiences in arriving at a judgment of the protagonist and the questions that are faced by this character.

As Stanley sees it, the listener's/reader's engagement with the speaker/protagonist is simultaneously an ordering of the "virtual world" of the story/novel and a kind of self-examination through the speaker's/protagonist's dilemma and assessment of her options (112-3). Thus, "our response to literature is determined not only by our networks of past experiences and current expectations for the novel, but by our experiences with similar narratives from oral contexts as well" (110); "the reader of the personal novel "is continuously engaged in
examining [her] own map of the narrative, searching for clues that will verify [her] own interpretation, and examining [her] own experiences for relevant parallels. In its reliance on, and constant referencing of, the personal narrative, the personal novel takes a folklore genre as its own frame and uses it to guide the reader's response" (120).

"The Constitutive Nature of Narrative"

Also interested in the creative nature of the personal narrative and its role in lending structure and meaning to the life of the personal-experience narrator is Richard Bauman. In his book Story, Performance, and Event, for example, Bauman assesses orally performed verbal art, focusing on its social context. Emphasizing the act of storytelling over story content, Bauman combines a close, formal analysis of his texts with an ethnographic examination of the ways by which their telling is accomplished, so that he might illustrate "the constitutive role of discourse in social life" (5). Challenging those who argue that language never quite captures the meaning of our experiences, Bauman asserts that "events are not the external raw materials out of which narratives are constructed"; rather, he says, "events are abstractions from narrative. It is the structures of signification in narrative that give coherence to events in our understanding, that enable us to construct in the interdependent processes of narration and interpretation a coherent set of interrelationships that we call an 'event'" (5).
Drawing on material collected from a group of small-town Texans over a period of several years, Bauman supports his claims by examining how information and point of view are managed in the oral narration of personal experiences. He demonstrates that story and event are reciprocal; his "close literary and functional analysis" of such tales reveals "in what way events may be taken as prior to and determinative of the narratives that recount them and in what ways the events may be seen as retroactively constituted by the narratives" (51). In the telling of a personal-experience story, the narrator provides an ultimately coherent view of the event that, most likely, no participant has as it is taking place; the narration provides it with meaning. With the telling of her tale, the narrator may set out to achieve a variety or combination of ends. To accomplish these goals, the storyteller must carefully control when and how she releases information: sometimes, for example, listeners must "watch" the action from her perspective in a scene; at other times, she must withhold the audience of what is to happen.

Bauman's work in *Story, Performance, and Event*—as well as his earlier *Verbal Art as Performance* and a more recent article, "The Framing and Reframing of Life Experience"—comprises far more than the analysis of the material generated by a small group of individual performers. Bauman presents folklorists with a powerful tool for understanding the nature of narrative, one that could be invaluable to teachers of writing. His exploration of the collaboration that occurs whenever a person tells a story to a listener (or group of listeners) is rich with implications for composition instructors—particularly as they seek ways to teach their students about
the complex process of "invention" and the necessity of continually maintaining "audience awareness" as one writes.

Performance Analysis

Over the past twenty-five years or so, the fields of composition and folklore studies have taken important strides in the same direction, moving from a focus on the final products of the creative act—that is, on texts—to a consideration of the process by which those texts are produced and the environments on which they are produced—that is, of context. In making this shift, both fields have turned to the methods of the social sciences—particularly, to those of anthropology—in their efforts to devise ways of understanding the means by which a given "folk group" or "discourse community" conveys its beliefs or values to its members. In adapting the ethnographic method for the study of oral narrative, folklorists have developed a critical system especially well-suited to the work of composition studies. This system, "the performance method" or "performance analysis," is primarily concerned with determining the relationships between texts and contexts.

Because it is a relatively young field, folkloristics has within recent memory been concerned with the marking off of its disciplinary territory. As it has established and identified more and more clearly its boundaries and its purview, folklorists have begun to turn their attention from the products of folkloric activity to the processes which inform that activity. With this shift in attention have come
changes in the methods by which folklorists work both to collect and to interpret their field data.

Scholars within virtually every one of the various folklore specializations have eventually recognized the need for a reconfiguration of their academic inquiries and have called for their colleagues to work not only on "itemizing" the materials belonging to the different folklore genres but on determining the connections between the forms that those materials take and the functions those materials serve in the cultural communities in which they are expressed. In general, folklore researchers now acknowledge that if they are to ascertain not only what folklore is but how and why it is enacted and transmitted as it is, they must record as fully as possible the circumstances in which it emerges, and they must read its performance with all aspects of the event in mind before they can suggest its possible meanings and usages.

For example, some early studies of folk medicine are content simply to label the different kinds of cures and related rituals practiced within a given population, listing the contents of various remedies and describing their ministrations by the people who express trust in the potions' efficacy. But more recent studies of the genre recognize that the researcher cannot truly understand the lore if she does not collect more than a list of ingredients for a remedy; she must move beyond a description of the medicine's proper application. If she is really to assess the significance of this folklore, the researcher must inquire as to her consultants' belief in and explanations for the remedy's healing properties; she must record information
about the effects the remedy has produced in particular situations; she must
determine when and how her consultants came to rely on the treatment or method.
And often, she will find this information embedded in narratives that argue for the
efficacy of the folk remedy. She will also want to look outward from her sources' personal lives to the life of the community to which these people belong—to past and current socio-political and -economical factors that might hold some influence over the culture's practices.

Likewise, the researcher pursuing insight into children's folklore must catalogue more than the rules of play for a traditional game: When is the game typically played? In what settings? By whom, specifically? What are the various roles that must be filled? Who typically fills each role? Are the rules ever altered or abandoned? Under what conditions might such changes be effected? And again, what are the social circumstances surrounding the lives of the children taking part in this ritual play? Only by asking such questions can the investigator come to realize the power and the messages of what she sees and hears as she seeks to discern the values that are reflected, created, and maintained in a particular culture's traditions.

An especially rich area for the study of "folklore-in-context" concerns itself with the relationships that form between storytellers and their audiences for the achievement of certain rhetorical effects. For the last two decades, folklorists studying oral literature have centered their attention on the organic nature of folk narrative and the dialogic interplay between a narrator and her audience for a given story. Prior to this shift in focus, narrative texts were more often than not
approached as stable entities—perhaps in part because they can be fixed in print by transcription. (This approach may also have been due to the literary training of so many folklorists.) Their readers assumed that they could be interpreted on their own, interrogated in isolation from the situations in which they had been produced (in much the same fashion by which the New Criticism studied the canonized classics of written literature).

Influential folklorist Richard Bauman describes the discipline's early focus on the products—rather than the processes—of narration in this way: "the modern concept of folklore, from its emergence in the eighteenth century until only very recently, has been concerned with oral literature as collectively shaped traditional material that could wander the map, fill up collections and archives, [and] reflect culture" (Story 2). Viewed as such, Bauman explains, oral literature appears to have a life of its own, subject only to impersonal processes and laws." But, he continues, these texts that we had seen as "the raw materials of oral literature" were merely abstractions—"thin and partial record[s] of deeply situated human behavior" that, in fact, "have their primary existence in the actions of people and their roots in the social realm" (Story 2).

So that we can profitably interpret a piece of oral literature, Bauman asserts, folklorists need to find ways of recovering and attending to a narrator's words, and they must also recover and attend to the human behavior that has surrounded those words in the social settings in which they have been spoken; only then do scholars have full and complete versions of the stories. In the seminal work Verbal Art as
Performance, Bauman articulates the fundamental premises on which he and a number of other folklorists began to base their studies of oral literature in the late 1970s. Breaking from the view that "the text is the thing," these folklorists read the tale in the light of the particular set of circumstances under which it is told: "artistic action—the doing of folklore—and artistic event—the performance situation, involving performer, art form, audience, and setting"—must occupy folklorists if they intend to appreciate fully the work that the speaker creates and understand completely the meaning that work conveys to the speaker's listeners (4).

In a later work, *Story, Performance, and Event* (1986), Bauman again expresses such notions: oral literature must be viewed, he asserts, "contextually and ethnographically, in order to discover the individual, social, and cultural factors that give it shape and meaning in the conduct of social life" (2). And with the performance approach to the study of narrative, it is in relation to narrative events that narrated events are understood. Performance analysis operates not from the traditional assumption that narratives are "verbal icons of the events they recount" (5) but from the position that narratives create events. Literary theory conceives of narratives as signs and events as the referents of those signs; narratives are "icons" of events—which are "antecedent or logically prior to" the narratives that represent them. Performance analysis, on the other hand, takes the alternative view that "events are abstractions from narratives. ...[T]he structures of signification in narration...give coherence to events in our understanding, that enable us to construct
in the interdependent processes of narrative and interpretation a coherent set of interrelationships that we call an 'event'" (5).

Throughout the body of his work, then, Bauman—like many of his colleagues—seeks to "go beyond a conception of oral literature as disembodied superorganic stuff"; he has been instrumental in bringing about "a basic reorientation from a conception of folklore as things [i.e., texts or items] to verbal art as a way of speaking, a mode of verbal communication" (Story 2). "The essence of oral literature, including its artfulness, is not to be discovered in folklore texts as conventionally conceived but in lived performances," Bauman writes; the performance-centered approach recognizes narrative as "fundamentally social" and so "open[s] the way to the elucidation of form-function relationships of which we have hitherto had only impressionistic inklings at best," due to folklorists' past tendency to study texts apart from their tellers and the settings in which they have been told (Story 8).

In explaining his belief that narration is a social act—that a personal experience story is inextricably linked to the conditions under which it is created—Bauman defines the situation that surrounds what he considers a "performance." The essence of "performance," he writes, "resides in the assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill, highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its referential content" (Story 3). Crucial to the identification of a "performance" is the point of view of the audience, for "performance" is said to occur when "the act of expression
on the part of the performer is . . . laid open to evaluation for the way it is done, for the relative skill and effectiveness of the performer's display" (3). In terms of its purpose, Bauman writes that "performance" is "also offered for the enhancement of experience, through the present appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself"; it "thus calls forth special attention to and heightened awareness of both the act of expression and the performer" (3).

As he advances "performance theory," Bauman often cites the example of personal-experience narrative, as he considers the genre one in which the factors of "performance" are highly visible; in so doing, he makes claims that seem to me applicable to the study of the work done in college writing courses. Citing William Labov's well-known research on "The Transformation of Experience in Narrative Syntax," Bauman argues that "one of the principal factors entering into the rendering of personal narrative as performance, and determining its effectiveness as performance, is the inclusion in the narrative of an evaluative component that indicates the nature and intensity of the narrator's feelings concerning the experience he is recounting—why he considers it worth telling about" (Verbal Art 26).

Bauman also contends that oral narratives of personal experience "provide an especially rich focus for the investigation of the relationship between oral literature and social life" because part of the special nature of narrative is to be doubly anchored in human events. That is, narratives are keyed both to the events in which they are told and the events that they recount, toward narrative events and narrated events" (Story 2). In other words, the storyteller takes the content of her
narrative from her own experience (or that reported by others) and, in turn, makes it the experience of her listeners. These two components in the creation of an oral narrative text are "radically interdependent," Bauman says, and one cannot be understood in isolation from the other; if we are truly to appreciate narrative meanings, we must devise "an analytical framework that can serve usefully and coherently for empirical investigations of the relationships among the elements" (Story 2-3).

Narrative Events

Bauman's approach to narrative acknowledges that "oral performance, like all human activity, is situated, its form, meaning, and functions rooted in culturally defined scenes or events—bonded segments of the flow of behavior and experience that constitute meaningful contexts for action, interpretation, and evaluation,"; therefore, "in the ethnography of oral performance, the performance event [assumes] a place beside the text as a fundamental unit of description and analysis, providing the most concretely empirical framework for the comprehension of oral literature as social action by directing attention to the actual conduct of artistic verbal performance in social life" (Story 3).

The analysis of narrative calls for identifying the performance events themselves in ways consistent with local understandings—in terms of such matters as setting, institutional context, occasioning principles—and relevant to the analytical problems, as "the structure of performance events is a product of the
systematic interplay of numerous situational factors, prominently including participants' identities and roles; the expressive means employed by the performance; social interactional ground rules, norms, and strategies for performance and criteria for its interpretation and evaluation; the sequence of actions that make up the scenario of the event" (Story 4).

In the analysis of performance in context, therefore, the researcher must identify anything that might be considered its "conventionalized, patterned organization"; however, it is important that the ethnographer keep in mind the fact that all performances of a given kind are not the same—"one wants to be able to comprehend and appreciate the individuality of each [performance] as well as the general structures common to all" (Story 4). That is, every performance, even the most ritualized, "will have a unique and emergent aspect, depending on the distinctive circumstances at play within it": events, in terms of performance analysis "are not frozen, predetermined molds...but are themselves situated social accomplishments"; "structures and conventions may provide precedents and guidelines for the range of alternatives possible, but the possibility of alternatives, the competencies and goals of the participants, and the emergent unfolding of the event make for variability" (Story 4).

And not only are event structures variable—so, too, are texts and social relations: "The models provided by generic conventions and prior renditions of 'traditional' items stand available to participants as a set of conventional expectations and associations, but these may themselves be used as resources for
creative manipulation, shaping the emergent text to the unique circumstances at hand"; likewise, social roles and interactions can be rearranged, depending on the individual parameters of the particular performance situation (Story 4). To summarize: in the performance analysis of oral literature, "the individual and the creative are brought to parity with tradition in a dialectic played out within the context of situated action, a kind of praxis" (Story 4).

**Narrated Events**

As Bauman attempts to demonstrate in his analysis of Texas storytellers, narrative can serve to establish what happened on a given occasion in a particular setting. It can also, however, serve as "an instrument for obscuring, hedging, confusing, exploring, or questioning what went on," keeping "the coherence or comprehensibility of narrated events open to question" (Story 5-6).

Broadly stated, the conceptual parameters of performance analysis as outlined by Bauman are these:

[The perspective of performance analysis], by focusing jointly on narrative and interpretation, provides a productive basis for an integrated framework that comprehends narrated event and narrative event within a unified frame of reference. The narrated event, as one dimension of the story's meaning, evoked by formal verbal means in the narrative text, is...emergent in performance, whatever the external status of the narrated event may be, whether it in some sense 'actually occurred' or is narratively constructed by participants out of cultural knowledge of how events are—or are not, or may be—constituted in social life. Thus, we can comprehend narrated event as well as narrative event within our overall concern with the interplay between the given available resources and patterns of narrative

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performance and the emergent functions and outcomes of that performance.

(Criticism of Bauman’s views on the performance of personal narrative often focus on the idea that the storyteller is to an extent “fictionalizing” when she recounts a personal experience. As Bauman points out, her story is shaped by her perception or evaluation of the incident significance; she includes and excludes information, and organizes information, in a way that suits her emerging understanding of the incident and is constructing the incident as she tells her tale.

Some folklorists contend that some types of experiences are not filtered through the individual’s consciousness and created at the time of narrative utterance. David J. Hufford is one such folklorist; he believes that in the case of supernatural or experiences, there is some deeply felt “core experience” that is not the product of rationality and narrative expression. I would answer Hufford’s criticism of Bauman and the performance-centered approach by saying that even mystical experiences like those studied by Hufford must eventually be mediated by language if they are to be shared with and understood by an audience, and in the process of rendering such experiences verbally, the storyteller must make evaluative choices. Different word choices carry different meanings, and language is culturally coded, so the narrator is interpreting her experience as she gives voice to it.

Also, I would point out in the context of Bauman’s ideas on narrative and performance the fact that there are many different types of narratives that function in many different capacities; thus, narratives can “argue” many different kinds of
positions.” Cautionary tales are told in conversations in which one participant wants to warn a listener to do (or not do) something. Other personal experience stories function as parables, offering commentary on the subjects at hand in the conversation. (For a detailed discussion of the later type of personal narrative, see Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblet’s “A Parable in Context.”) Just as there are myriad and diverse aims for persuasion, there are myriad and diverse aims for personal narrative.

Life Story/Life Review

Bauman’s claims reinforce those asserted by both Sandra Stahl and David Stanley. Bauman’s theories also underscore those of Jeff Todd Titon and Patrick B. Mullen, two folklorists who explore the ways that personal narratives determine and reveal identity. Both Titon and Mullen are interested in the "life story," defined by Titon as "a person's story of his or her life, or of what he or she thinks is a significant part of that life" (276). Like the anecdotal personal-experience story that centers on one particular event, the life story sequence of discrete narratives develops through interaction between speaker and audience; indeed, Titon contends that the listener's "presence and reactions are essential" (276). Typically emerging from conversation, such a story relies on trust and respect between the teller and listener, the latter working sympathetically with the former: "[The listener] nods assent, interposes a comment, frames a relevant question" as the teller recounts an incident or recreates a period from the past (276).
Also interested in the "life story," or "life review," is folklorist Patrick B. Mullen. In his book *Listening to Old Voices: Folklore, Life Stories, and the Elderly*, Mullen transcribes and analyzes his extensive interviews with nine aged storytellers who function as "tradition-bearers" in their communities. In putting together his "portraits" of his nine consultants, Mullen came to realize that each of his interviewees had worked to achieve a coherent, unified version of his or her personal history over the course of their conversations. Each of the informants had a particular view of him- or herself that he or she sought to assert and affirm; the personal experience narratives that he or she chose to share with the visiting folklorist ultimately attempted persuasion—were aimed at demonstrating that the storyteller’s self-assessment was an accurate and valid one.

Mullen’s mostly broad, open-ended questions gave his elderly subjects the chance to prove themselves, however they saw fit. He asked them some questions "but let the individual establish the direction and specific topics to be discussed"; therefore, he had an influence on what was said and how it was presented." Nonetheless, he notes, "folk performers have "a way of getting their points of view across" (7), so that finally, each "life reviewer" is building an identity for him- or herself, arguing for a particular "reading" of his or her life.

Mullen's consultants provided him with a wealth of information on folkways and regaled him with local legends— and, he determined, "Carrying on cultural and individual traditions helped give meaning to their lives" (2). But so did the process of their discussing those traditions with a researcher. Certain themes were
discernible throughout the material Mullen gathered from each of his informants; the stories that each performer chose to share in the end reflected a consistent set "values, attitudes, beliefs and personality traits," those that were most important to each individual (9).

The aged people Mullen spoke with employed reminiscence "to integrate the disparate elements of their lives" (18), he says. Citing the work of psychologists concerned with the elderly, Mullen theorizes that his interviewees were "maintaining self-esteem, reaffirming a sense of identity, working through and mastering personal losses, and contributing positively in society" while they were engaged in the process of reviewing their lives (17); "their storytelling was "a ritual process of continuity—healing, correcting, connecting, resolving" (19). Thus, Mullen concludes that "when an elderly person tells a personal narrative as part of a life story, he or she is attempting to impose order on life, and the principle of order can change depending on the particular point of view at the time" (15).

Moreover, Mullen deduces, "the life review has important...communal functions: ...it connects one generation to another, passing on or reconstructing traditions that are important for the survival of the community" (18). Reflecting on his assessments of the material he has elicited from his consultants, he asserts that "[i]n one sense the [folk performer's] stories [are] expanded through the act of interpretation: a story has an immediate surface meaning, but it also has other meanings when seen in relation to other kinds of folklore, to the life of the
individual, and to the cultural context and performance situation in which it is communicated" (9).

"Experiential Meaning"

While many folklorists who study the personal experience narrative concentrate on the tellers of such stories, Donald Braid focuses his attention on those who hear these tales. In a 1996 article published by the Journal of American Folklore, Braid focuses his attention on "the listener's experience of 'following' or making sense of the unfolding narrative performance" (5). He suggests that "the experience of following can give rise to affectively engaging states of mind of flows of thought" which he terms "experiential meanings"; he explores "the parallels between comprehending lived experience and the process of following narrative performance" for the purpose of determining how listeners constitute such meanings. He goes on to suggest "how the formation of experiential meanings in following narrative performance can make narrative a particularly effective vehicle for communicating experience to others in a pragmatically useful form" (5).

At the base of Braid's theories is a set of assumptions that are very much in line with those of Sandra Stahl and Richard Bauman—and with those of the compositionists who have been deemed "social constructionists." Assuming "a performance-centered approach to oral narrative in which the text, narrative event, and narrated event form an indissoluble unity," Braid views the personal narrative as the narrator's account of a "perceived past experience"; when performed, the story
presents a series of *selected, interpreted* events," shaping for them "a coherent sequence" so that they can be "followed and, therefore, experienced by listeners" (6). "It must be recognized," he asserts, that "the coherence that informs a narrative is the combined product of the narrator's own understanding of 'what happened,' the creative artistry that manifests itself in the poetics of his or her performance, and the emergent dynamics of the performance event. The coherence that listeners perceive in the experience of following is therefore constructed not only from the dynamic relationships of the narrated event but also with respect to the narrator's interpretation and presentation of his or her experience, the dynamics of the performance event, and the experiential resources listeners bring with them into the performance event. (6)

In other words, achieving coherence is a dynamic and interactive process that develops among teller, listener, and context. Braid elaborates on this important notion as follows:

Because of parallels between lived experience and the process of following a narrative, the listener's struggle to follow a narrative must be seen as an experience in its own right. Part of this experience of following involves a recontextualization of the narrative imagery and events in terms of the listener's own life experience. In this sense personal narratives can generate experiential resources for the listener—resources that may be 'thought with' and 'thought through' in the struggle to make sense of the world. (6)

He continues working to establish the idea that narrator and audience work in tandem to make meaning when he writes, "With oral narrative the teller and listener are copresent, and their exchange plays out interactively in real time. Aspects of performance such as timing, intonation, gesture, and situational context may play
crucial roles in the experience of following. Listeners' sensory perceptions and their interpretations of the social dynamics of performance events are therefore essential resources implicated in their experience and comprehension of oral narrative performances" (7).

The discussion built upon these premises is an interdisciplinary tour de force. Drawing on the work of reader response theorist Stanley Fish, anthropologist Dell Hymes, philosopher of history Louis Mink (not to mention “insights from phenomenology and Gestalt psychology”), Braid turns to the source of the coherence that narrators seek to impose on the events they verbally render when they tell others about their experiences. Citing the seminal work of Labov and Waletzky, Braid emphasizes the importance of sequence to the performance of personal narrative: it is "motivated and organized" by an "evaluative function" (Braid 8; Labov and Waletzky 13). That is, "the listener follows the narrative sequence as it unfolds, at any given moment trying to integrate the emerging narrative information into a coherent sense of 'what is happening.' Following a narrative is not a linear process. Narratives are not structured like arguments, where a sequence of statements logically leads to a clearly visible conclusion. With narrative the listener follows a plot as it unfolds, accepting wild and unpredictable contingencies as long as the narrative shows them to be 'acceptable after all' as it moves toward an unpredictable conclusion" (8-9).

Therefore, following a narrative "involves a repeated reframing of the perceived events in an attempt to predict the narrative course and grasp the
coherence that informs the narrative and gives it meaning. While the organizing principle may be seen as atemporal, the process of following or comprehending is [itself] experiential; it is an active process that takes place within time. The listeners' struggle to make sense of the narrative is crucial. Through this struggle they are led to tentatively accept or experience the coherence of the narrative, a pattern that . . . embodies the ideology of the narrator (Braid 9).

Thus, "significant meaning is generated in the active process of following a narrative—in the struggle to follow narrative threads and contingencies, grasp the narrative coherence, and make sense of what is going on at a given point in the narrative unfolding"—"following a narrative is an experiential process that can generate states of mind—or more dynamically, flows of thought—that effectively or affectively engage the listener. These states of mind or flows of thought may arise from both emergent individual constructions of sense making and from the sequence in which these constructions unfold in time," and "features of performance such as prosody, intonation, metanarrative, genre, and framing may provide 'data' that are integrated into the listener's interpretation as they follow the narrative" (10).

"Coherence is centrally implicated in the process of following a narrative," Braid points out, and, he argues, "our perception of coherence in the events of the world does not derive from an objective reading of these events, but is a product of the experiential process" (12). This process, he concludes, "involves a coherence making in which lived experience is understood with respect to culturally based interpretational frameworks, past experiences, and projections of what is expected to
happen" (12). Furthermore, "this transformation of experience to narrative as intended communication builds on this experiential coherence-making, but additionally involves the narrator's strategic selection and presentation of experience. In this presentation of experience, the formal features of performance become resources the narrator can use to suggest experiential meanings" (12).

In life and in listening, "past experience—'what has gone on before'—is . . . an essential resource in making sense of present experience" (15). One uses past memories to create coherence as events are unfolding and after they take place and one is thinking or conversing about them: "an individual can bring these past experiences into the present as resources that allow 'what is going on now' to be understood with respect to 'what went on in the past'" (15). Similarly, "interpretations of what is going on now are also influenced by the experiencer's projections of the future—what he or she expects will go on, or wants to go on . . . ." One goal of understanding the present is focused toward predicting what will happen so we can think and act appropriately" (15).

At the crux of Braid's discussion are the following ideas:

Making sense out of lived experience . . . involves a process whereby an individual breaks the flux of experience into significant units and reassembles them into a coherent and meaningful gestalt of 'what is going on.' Interpretational choices draw on past resources provided by interpretational frameworks and past experience. They draw potently on the future . . . and are contingent on their ongoing usefulness in making sense of the unfolding present. Sense making is a dynamic process that takes place within the temporal thickness of the individual's present awareness" (15-16). It is also "emergent"—"individuals are constantly updating, reinterpreting, reforming or abandoning their 'understandings' as needed and as required by subsequent experience" (16). Narrative, then, is "a
fundamental way of apprehending the flux of experience"; "in many ways we understand the present happenings of the world by telling ourselves stories about 'what is going on'" (16).

From Braid's perspective, this process by which we apprehend what is happening as we live out our experiences is comparable to the process by which we follow another individual's understanding of her experiences as it is reflected in any narratives she constructs in the course of assessing those experiences. As we listen to another individual's story of her experiences, we call up relevant personal experiences (or "narrative memories") of our own, as well as any knowledge we have of the storyteller's other prior experiences and our cultural frames of reference: "an individual's own associations, and shared associations with the teller, create a context of knowledge which informs the listener's understanding of what the narrative means" (18).

In short, Braid contends that we use our past experiences in the present to make sense of what is going on around us; he then argues that we draw on these resources when we are experiencing what is happening around us and when we are attempting to comprehend a storyteller's personal narrative—the two processes mirror one another. Taking this claim to its logical conclusion, Braid asserts the notion that the listener who does follow a narrator's account of a lived experience in a sense makes the storyteller's tale part of her own experience: the listener is engaged with the story and its narrated events in same way that she is engaged with what is going on within and around her as she carries out her own day-to-day activities.
As a result, "the coherence that listeners perceive in following a narrative is effectively a synthesis of the performed coherence and the coherence that is formed through the listeners' experiential process. The experiential meanings listeners construct are very much their own" (18). Ultimately, experiential meaning "derives from a direct experience of the unfolding narrative performance in a process parallel to how individuals experience the flow of duration in lived experience . . . . [T]he process of experiencing in following narrative allows listeners to transform narrative, and therefore other people's experience, into a resource for living their own lives" (26). People "literally learn from the experience of others," Braid concludes, and following a narrative can "generate experiential resources that are pragmatically useful in dealing with future experiences in the 'real world'" (26-27).

Braid's model of the communicative transaction as it occurs between storyteller and listener is immediately useful to a pragmatic understanding of what happens when students write and listen to personal narratives and to the argumentative essays they produce as well, since such essays are so often grounded in personal experience. The idea that one integrates one's own experiences with those of others via storytelling is highlighted in a unique way by Braid's work, and a reading of it underscores several important dimensions of current composition pedagogy (as I will discuss below).
Folkloristics in the College Writing Classroom

In their work on the personal narrative, Sandra Stahl, Richard Bauman, Jeff Todd Titon, Patrick B. Mullen, and Donald Braid discuss the matters that are at the heart of designing and teaching college-level composition courses. In beginning composition classes, instructors strive to help students see how they learn and how they communicate throughout their lives so they can become as skilled as possible at the kinds of written discourse with which they will need to develop proficiency. Folkloristics offers compelling evidence that composition teachers can more readily accomplish the goals of their courses if they pay special heed to the process of narration. Below are some of the particular implications of personal narrative scholarship for first-year college writing classes.

Sandra Stahl Revisited

Certainly the student in the first-year writing class differs from a person who chooses to share a personal-experience anecdote orally, extemporaneously, in the course of a conversation with a friend or family member (or an interviewer): the student does not spontaneously opt to render verbally a meaningful incident from her past but is assigned the task of portraying that significant event for an audience she herself has probably not selected; perhaps she has even been asked to arrive at a specific kind of "point" to her story. And, of course, the student-narrator, more than likely working in a process-oriented classroom, takes her personal-experience narrative through a series of several drafts, revising extensively, to achieve the most
effective presentation of the material possible within the given time frame for the project.

But like the narrator of an orally delivered personal-experience anecdote, the student-narrator inevitably reflects in her storytelling her social and cultural background—her goals, hopes, attitudes, and beliefs—as these influences determine her perception of her experience and dictate the choices she makes as she casts and recasts the incident for her readers. In composing her papers, she, too, is reliving and re-evaluating her experiences; as she tries to represent those experiences powerfully, convincingly, and coherently for her readers, employing many of the devices oral storytellers use, she is likely seeing the events in new ways, learning new lessons from them, attaching new meanings to them—and thus, she is not simply expressing her values but building them.

The oral storyteller and the student writer also share a sensitivity to context—specifically, to the reactions they receive from the audiences for their narratives. Each of these "speakers" is with every draft inviting her different readers or listeners to join her in her analyzing her experiences and, thereby, in her building of a worldview and a belief system. Implicit in either narrator's publicizing of her experiences is a request for interpretation; the audience is asked to approve the narrator's choices and to endorse her actions and the motivations behind them; the narrator basically looks to her listeners or readers for an affirmation of the values that her actions and choices suggest or reveal. The narrator identifies herself in the construction of her stories; she then asks her readers or listeners to appraise what
she has done—and, by extension, who she is. The responses of the audience may even change the storyteller's perception of the experience and her sense of its significance: reactions to the story may lead to alterations in the shape taken by the narrative—and so, the event.

David Stanley Revisited

I argue that like the "personal novel," the nonfiction work that first-year writers produce in their beginning writing courses is a literary counterpart to the oral personal-experience narrative. I also argue that those students are like the members of the audience for the personal novel: they know their requirements as readers (as well as writers) and succeed in them because they meet the same demands whenever they encounter the personal-experience narrative in conversation or are compelled to deliver such narratives themselves. Succeeding at these tasks, particularly in a politically charged classroom where difficult, complicated material is being treated, they achieve a kind of confidence that enables them to see themselves as authorities in that classroom, so that, in turn, they accomplish increasingly sophisticated tasks.

The reciprocal processes that take place with the act of narrating a personal experience story—value-revealing and value-making—clearly take place throughout as my students work through the assignment sequences described and outlined in Chapters 1 and 4 of this dissertation.
Richard Bauman Revisited

Many of Richard Bauman's statements describe the writing classroom as aptly as they do the situation in which the folk narrator works. In Bauman's terms, the first-year students who populate beginning-composition courses are most definitely "performers," and the activities that take place in writing classrooms most definitely culminate in "performances." Indeed, such classrooms exist explicitly to "call forth special attention to and heightened awareness of both the act of expression and the performer" (Bauman, Story 3).

By entering the university, and thereafter enrolling in its required seminars, the student tacitly "assumes responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill"—that is, she agrees to complete a range of assignments in which, essentially, she is to demonstrate her mastery of the materials presented and examined in her courses by effectively articulating her own understandings and syntheses of those materials. Throughout most of her coursework, the student claims her proficiency with course materials by writing about what she is learning, generally in response to questions or problems posed by her professors, to produce essays of varying scope and depth on the subjects she is studying. In one sense, then, we might say that any course the student takes in some way demands that she be a "performer" who, in a number of different forms, "narrates" the "story" of her processing the information that her texts and her teachers have laid before her.

In the typical "content course" (for example, a survey of twentieth-century American history, a philosophy seminar on ethics, a chemistry practicum), the
student's sole audience for her essays is likely her instructor, and the referential
content of her work is principally what her reader evaluates—the effectiveness of
the student's writing is marginally considered, if it is considered at all, and more
often than not the quality of the student's writing is not a factor in the evaluator's
final, overall judgment of the student's efforts and insights.

But in the composition classroom, students are "performers" in the same
sense that narrators of personal experience are such: in this environment, more so
than in nearly any other academic setting, teachers and students alike are
"highlighting the way in which communication is carried out, above and beyond its
referential content." In the student-centered, process-oriented first-year writing
course the content is "the way in which communication is carried out," and
continually, "the act of expression on the part of [a] performer is laid open to
evaluation for the way it is done." Here, too, the teacher reads and evaluates the
texts produced by the student, but the teacher is only one of many readers and
evaluators who react to a given piece of work. In these classes, students look at
each other's drafts of their papers, during "peer responding sessions," commenting
on what carries strong rhetorical impact and making suggestions for improvements.

As well, the students in the student-centered, process-oriented writing
classroom are frequently asked to examine professional (published) essays, along
with essays written by past students in prior sections of the course. In class
discussions of this reading material, they are constantly asked to weigh "the relative
skill and effectiveness of [each] performer's display" of her experiences and her
thoughts on their significance. The idea is that with these continual exercises in the assessment of various kinds of discourse, the student will become increasingly proficient in the drafting and editing of her own work. At their most fundamental level, introductory writing courses are offered to—in fact, are required of—our students “for the enhancement of experience through the present appreciation of the intrinsic qualities of the act of expression itself” (Bauman, *Story, Performance, and Event*).

Reading first-year writers' texts as "performances" can increase our understanding of how students apprehend the writing process and help us see how we might construct our courses to promote those students' academic successes. It also seems to me that students' texts tell us about their experiences outside the classroom and their experiences of the classroom, if those texts are read as "performances"—even when they are not explicitly, overtly "narrative essays."

**Jeff Titon and Pat Mullen Revisited**

In their considerations of the "life story" or "life review," Jeff Titon and Pat Mullen reveal that the storyteller who relates a series of personal narratives is often at work on a kind of argumentation: it is clear that for both of these folklorists "the past is an imaginative construct that reflects our needs in the present" (Mullen 8). Like Stahl and Stanley, Titon and Mullen see that the individual personal experience story contains an implicit argument; their work extends this notion to demonstrate that a "cycle" of personal narratives will likewise tend to assert and support a
unifying "thesis." Their considerations of the argumentative function tacitly served by narratives that are told in succession of one another for the purpose of making a claim about an individual's personal history provide a useful model for both teachers and students of writing; their research is of value to the classroom both theoretically and practically.

Composition instructors might discuss the concept of life review at the outset of their classes in the course of explaining that students continually construct arguments in their daily lives and are, therefore, quite well prepared for the kinds of critical inquiry college demands of them. The form of the life story might also be discussed with students as they prepare to draft expository essays in which they must provide readers with a series of examples that justify their contentions about a body of material that they have evaluated, since ultimately, the life review is a kind of synthesis of myriad experiences and observations. As I will explain in Chapter 4 of this dissertation, the ideas that Titon and Mullen deal with readily provide the underpinnings for a narrative-centered composition curriculum.

Perhaps surprisingly, Mullen's findings in his study of the personal narratives told by people in old age are especially relevant here, in a consideration of college students as they become acculturated to the university. Life review is not solely the province of the elderly—younger people at various stages in their lives are also prompted to look back and try to make sense of their collected experiences. Traditional age college students—and returning adult students, many of whom are middle-aged—are poised to do the same types of reflection and synthesis.
First-year writers come to us at an extremely vulnerable period in their lives, whether they are embarking upon adult life at age eighteen or returning to school at midlife on the way to starting new careers. A large percentage of them are feeling out of their element as they start college: either they feel that they’re not prepared for the work they’re about to embark upon, or they feel that they are more than equal to the challenge. They often perceive themselves as needing to “prove” themselves—to demonstrate that they have succeeded as writers in the past and are therefore “college material.” They worry that their new teachers might not recognize all they have learned and been rewarded for in the past. Or they view themselves as hopelessly inadequate and enter Beginning Composition apologetically, fully prepared to fail. Many seek out their professors after their first class meetings to admit that they “have never been good at English” and will “need a lot of help.”

In their conversations and their papers, eighteen- and nineteen-year-old students continually indicate that they also fear they will lose their uniqueness and their identities when they come to college. Many are leaving their families and the friends who have known them for years. They will for the first time be living among people with whom they have no shared history, and they worry that they will have trouble making their “true selves” known to a whole new group of advisors and peers. As Jay Mechling notes in an essay on the functions of the folk groups college students join, “To the institution of the university students bring a constellation of values, meanings, and beliefs acquired from family and close
friends in their home worlds"; when they enter the university, "their ties to [their] home world[s] weaken. They often must work hard to sustain those home values, and they must effect a reconciliation of their values with those brought from [others'] home worlds and with those of the institution itself" (342).

Similarly, "mature" students—those who enroll at the university in their 20s, 30, 40s, and even 50s—often tend to see themselves in tenuous positions. They are often concerned that they have been away from school too long to function adequately in the academic setting. They frequently want their professors know that they may have "forgotten everything" they learned about writing when they were last in the classroom. Or they remark, in confessional tones, "The young kids know more than I do. I've been out of school for so many years—it's all changed."

When adult students come to tell their instructors that they might require extra assistance in completing their assignments, they talk about how "lucky" they are to be fulfilling "their dreams of going back to school"; they speak of having "second chances" and of their commitments to "making it through" their programs, even if other responsibilities might try to hold them back. The older student tends to take this time to explicitly indicate that she is "serious" about her work (it might not appear so if she does not immediately perform her best); she wants to be sure that her instructor knows that her decision to undertake college coursework has not been made lightly and that she will not take the opportunities before her for granted. Like their younger counterparts, the adult students worry that their "true selves" will not
be immediately recognizable to their teachers—people who will set high standards for them and evaluate their performances.

Moreover, adult students often feel the need to account for the time that has passed since they last attended school; they are eager to explain what kinds of employment they have had thus far, to make sense of their delaying of their college educations. The stories they tell about their work histories seem intended to show that there are areas in which they can and do feel comfortable and in control—areas in which they have expertise. But generally, their work histories also consider why they are now working toward degrees; these older students make a point of identifying their career goals to their professors. And the fact that the student has carefully evaluated her past experiences and determined that her circumstances in life could somehow be improved by her embarking upon a course of university study—might be offered as evidence that she is prepared to be the kind of critical thinker who can succeed in the university environment.

If for no other reason than the fact that they are primed for looking at where they are going and where they have been, first-year writing students ought to be assigned to narrate their personal histories or "life stories." But as the folklorists I have discussed here so amply indicate, there are multiple reasons for giving storytelling a more prominent locus in the college composition course.
Donald Braid Revisited

There are at least three sites in the composition classroom at which Donald Braid's claims about "experiential meaning" apply: his work has implications for the assignments students are given, the in-class activities they undertake, and the peer responding they typically do in the process-oriented writing class. Braid's assertions reinforce the idea that students who are working to master the demands of critical thinking and writing, since—like Stahl, Bauman, Stanley, Titon, and Mullen—he suggests that the storyteller who narrates a personal experience, in selecting and organizing the "data" of an incident, in effect makes a case for an interpretation of what has happened. In the process of living the experience—"following" it, giving "coherence" to it—the individual can be said to tell herself a story, Braid contends; in other words, she is making an argument to herself about what is taking place even as it occurs. And when she goes on to relive the experience for an audience, she reinterprets what has gone on, sharpening her sense of the event with each repetition of the tale. If writing teachers construct assignments that can make these notions clear to their first-year students, they can go a long way toward those students' work on more obviously argumentative writing. A careful consideration of the narrative process can "demystify" the seemingly more daunting task of persuasive discourse.

Moreover, in turning away from the teller of the story to focus on the listener who hears someone else's personal narrative, Braid underscores the value of having beginning college writers share their experiences with one another in class discussion and for the purposes of peer review sessions. When he maintains that the
auditor for a personal narrative "follows" another person's story in the same way that she "follows" ongoing incidents as they unfold in her own life, thereby making the storyteller's experience a part of her own repertoire of knowledge on which she can draw in evaluating future situations and making future decisions, Braid beautifully articulates a rationale for asking students to compare their reactions to their reading and writing assignments as much as possible. As they describe their experiences with these materials—and any relevant experiences from their more remote pasts—they are providing one another with a means of expanding their resources for understanding the subjects at hand. In listening to her classmates' stories of experiences related to the content of their reading assignments, the student may strengthen her convictions on the topics under consideration, or she may revise her thinking on those topics to accommodate her cohorts' views.

Furthermore, Braid's theories suggest that we need to build into our composition courses as many opportunities as possible for students to talk about their experiences with the very processes of reading and writing. According to Braid's line of thinking, students who describe for one another how they came up with the ideas for their papers, or how they ordered their thoughts on their topics, or how they reshaped a portion of an essay as they worked are providing each other with further writing experience. Each person is gaining additional strategies for invention and organization and revision from her peers because by listening to her classmates' accounts, she is integrating their experiences with hers. In Braid's words, she is "literally learning from others" because her peers' stories are joining
her own in the catalog of personal narratives that informs her perceptions, choices, and actions as she goes about her living her life.

I think these ideas could galvanize the practice of having first-year writers write and critique each other's work "in front of" one another. When Student A hears Student B explain how he accomplished a certain effect in a paper he has written, Student A has then, in a sense, written in that same way and may use this "new" method the next time she encounters a similar assignment. Likewise, when Student C describes for Student D what she "hears" him saying in a draft of his essay, Student C is showing D what it is like to read his paper; he has then experienced a different way of seeing his work and is more fully equipped to make it clear and compelling.

Conclusion

In their assessments of the creative nature of narrative and the constitutive role of discourse in social life, the folklorists considered here offer us powerful reasons for placing narrative at the center, rather than on the margins, of the university's introductory-level writing courses. With their focus on the negotiations that take place between tellers of personal experience stories and their listeners, these folklorists abundantly suggest that expressivist pedagogy and social constructionist pedagogy can peacefully coexist in the same first-year composition classroom; adherents of the two schools of thought need not see one another as opponents.
Over the past several years, I have been working to make narrative a vital component of virtually all my first-year writing assignments, and I have seen that we can enable beginning composition students to succeed as critical writers by helping them see that informative and persuasive essays in some sense rely on the elements of narrative discourse. In the chapters that follow, I will critique first-year writing textbooks to demonstrate how they minimize the importance of narrative (to their detriment), and I will describe two first-year composition curricula which show just how narrative discourse can be infused throughout a class on argumentative and persuasive writing. Between 1990 and 2000, I collected all of the papers produced by the students in my basic writing and first-year composition courses. Over those ten years, I was teaching three to four sections of these courses per term; thus, I was able to amass an enormous volume of student work by which to evaluate the success of the syllabi I had developed when I began seeking to apply folkloristics to my composition pedagogy. I also interviewed several students from each of the courses I taught at Ohio State in order to get their impressions of the writing assignments they had completed for my classes. My assessments of the assignments I developed are based on this accumulation of data.
CHAPTER 3:

NARRATIVE AS PRESENTED IN FIRST-YEAR WRITING TEXTBOOKS

Introduction

A textbook is designed to be a set of exercises, readings and guidelines that presents authoritatively the primary precepts of a field. In particular, writing textbooks are meant to describe the composing process overall and to specify how certain modes of discourse are constructed. Implicit in these descriptions and instructions is an epistemological stance that to date has generally separated analytical writing from personal experience writing. By scrutinizing the structures (implicit and explicit) and recommended procedures in the various academic publishers’ “flagship” textbooks for first-year writing courses, composition theorists will see that the “rhetorics” currently being used with beginning students unnecessarily privilege argumentative writing over narrative.

Typically, narrative is presented to beginning composition students as a type of writing that is wholly different from other types of writing—specifically, it is generally treated as entirely distinct from analytical or persuasive writing, the sorts
of writing in which an author asserts and defends a position. The textbooks now in wide usage do take into account the notion that personal narrative is a process by which the individual can come to better understand herself and her experiences, and they likewise indicate that the storyteller's audience affects what she ultimately produces—they suggest that the effort to build a coherent narrative, by supplying the kinds of cues that will enable the reader to "follow" a story, results in the writer's discovery of her true feelings about what she has done and seen. But these messages tend to be conveyed in subtle terms; furthermore, there is hardly ever any explicit discussion of narration as a critical endeavor that shares the elements of argumentation.

Narrative Writing Guidelines

One of the most widely used first-year writing texts, Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper's *The Concise Guide to Writing* (a condensed version of the more elaborate *St. Martin's Guide to Writing*), provides a fairly effective discussion of narrative writing and its revelatory function; however, this popular book discusses narration as a critical activity only briefly, and for the most part in indirect ways. Its chapter on narrative writing—significantly titled "Remembering an Event"—purports to focus on the storytelling process, but it ultimately places its emphasis on the product of narration; the suggestion is that in academic discourse, the narrative functions as a device for the critical writer and is valuable primarily in its service to the purposes of the argumentative or persuasive essay.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the way in which the act of narrating a personal experience might be said to shape the individual and her experience:
[People write autobiographical stories perhaps] out of nostalgia for the past, but perhaps as well to make sense of the past. When we write about significant events in our lives, we come to know ourselves better, bringing into focus what’s truly important to us and clarifying our beliefs and values. We also examine the forces—within ourselves and our social structures—that have shaped our lives and perspectives. (17)

Immediately following this introduction is a consideration of the ways in which our knowledge of ourselves and our world is communally constructed:

In addition, writing about our lives for others to read—and reading about other people’s lives—can help us better understand one another. Often, we can see in other people’s autobiography reflections of our own lives. Yet we are also reminded of the differences among us: reading autobiography teaches us to celebrate individuality. It also shows us how the material conditions of our lives—whether we are rich or poor, male or female, black or white, young or old—may affect how we think of ourselves as well as how we're treated by others. (17)

Elaborating on the idea that the circumstances in which a story is told shape the tale and thus the tells, the preface to the chapter continues:

...While it invites self-disclosure, writing autobiography need not be confessional. You get to choose how you want to represent yourself, what side of you to reveal. Your choice depends on the rhetorical situation in which you are writing: who you expect to read your story (your audience) and what you want them to learn about you from it (your purpose). We obviously are not exactly the same in every situation, and don't necessarily want others to respond to us in the same way all the time. Based on our purpose in writing to a particular audience, we make choices on how to present ourselves, sometimes taking risks and other times playing it safe. (17)
Concluding the discussion on the nature of narrative in general, Axelrod and Cooper assert, "Writing about personal experience involves fashioning a self in words much as a novelist constructs a character. As readers, we come to 'know' the people we read about by the way they are described as well as by what they say and do" (17).

Although it does not do so explicitly, the introductory passage does indicate that a narrative in essence argues a position; this notion is suggested as Axelrod and Cooper describe the writing strategies with which "Remembering an Event" concerns itself:

As you work through this chapter, you will learn to present purposefully by the telling the story of your experience. You will learn to organize and pace the action to create dramatic tension; to describe scenes and people to make the story vivid and specific; to convey through words and images the event's significance to make the story meaningful. (17)

The idea that a story's details are chosen with the narrative's ultimate purpose in mind is a crucial one; recognition of this concept is important to an understanding of the similarities or connections between narrative essays and "thesis + support" writing. However, the authors spend little time on the idea that the storyteller is engaged in a critical endeavor, and when they do address the idea they do so only implicitly. The way in which a narrator backs an interpretation of events with her descriptive choices is addressed very subtly; the idea that storytelling contains the elements of argumentation and persuasion is presented in a sophisticated way that the beginning writer may not discern.

Even more problematic, in my view, is the way in which Axelrod and Cooper ultimately explain the reasons for working to become an effective storyteller in the first-year college composition course. In launching the chapter on
"Remembering an Event," its authors address their rationale for including a chapter on narration in a college writing text; this passage attempts to help the student understand why she is being asked to describe a personal experience in a class designed to prepare her for future coursework:

Storytelling, you will discover, is an essential strategy in both academic and professional writing. Not only are some essays organized narratively like stories, but even essays organized topically often include the brief, 'telling' stories we call anecdotes as illustrations for the main ideas. (17)

As the language of the above remarks rightly indicates, the beginning composition student does not usually expect to be asked to start her university writing career by recreating something that she personally has experienced; she has likely been told by her high-school teachers to expect assignments that call for her to take and defend a position. The composition teacher who begins the course by asking for a narrative frequently entertains questions as to when the class will take on "real" college writing, writing that "deals with issues" and "starts with an opinion"—argumentative writing that is structured deductively rather than inductively. But as it accounts for the presence of the narrative assignment in the first-year writing curriculum, The Concise Guide to Writing reinforces a faulty idea and wastes an opportunity.

A listing of sample narrative assignments compounds the problem by presenting narrative writing as entirely separate from argumentative or persuasive writing. The section of "Remembering an Event" that demonstrates where storytelling might be required of college students asserts, "In college, you may well
have occasion to write about some of your experiences for your courses," then asks the reader to consider a "typical assignment":

**For a psychology course:** Erik Erikson observed that "young people ... are sometimes preoccupied with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are." Test this idea against your own adolescent experience. Recount a single event when you cared tremendously about what your peers thought of you. How did their judgment influence your behavior and your sense of self? (18)

Later, these two assignments are listed:

**For a political science course:** Voter apathy is known to be a widespread problem, but not much is known about the origins of voting behavior. Recall the first time you became interested in an election, and tell about the incident in some detail. Looking back on the incident, what did it teach you about the origins of your own voting behavior?

**For a linguistics course:** Many linguists argue that what is considered appropriate grammar and word choice varies from one context to another. Recall an occasion when you used language that others considered inappropriate or offensive. What did you say or write? How did you know your language had gone over prescribed boundaries? If you did it on purpose, explain why. (18)

My experiences as the director of a Writing Center regularly exposes me to the assignments of professors from other disciplines, and the projects I have seen make me believe the above are not the kinds of assignments that typically count for a great deal of the students' work in their "content courses." Rather, they call for the sorts of things professors have students write initially to engage them with their reading material and the concepts with which the students must be familiar in order to work on their weightier, lengthier assignments. This carries with it the
impression that narrative writing is "easier" and less sophisticated than other types of writing. In other words, Axelrod and Cooper present a slate of narrative assignments that students might encounter if they are required to keep journals or write short position papers; there is no indication of the fact that there might be a narrative element to, say, research papers or lab reports. Narrative is again treated as a kind of writing that is wholly separate from other types of discourse.

Later in the "Remembering an Event" chapter, in a section titled "Purpose and Audience," the authors tell students, "Writers have various reasons for writing about their experiences. Reminiscing makes it possible to relive moments of pleasure and pain, but it also helps writers gain insight, to learn who they are now by examining who they used to be and the forces that shaped them. Reflecting on the past can lead to significant self-discovery" (34). These remarks very nicely make the point that storytelling is one of our most powerful "ways of knowing." Yet there is no consideration of the fact that a person who writes a story in which she achieves self-revelation is in some sense arguing a position and asking a reader to accept a critical reading of a situation.

In discussing the "Basic Features of Essays About Remembered Events," Axelrod and Cooper at times make writing about personal experiences an objective activity whose goal is capturing a reality that is not shaped by the author but exists outside the writer. One of the "basic features" shared by personal narratives is "a well-told story," according to the guidelines listed here, and "writing about remembered events means first of all telling an interesting story." "Interesting" is then equated with "suspenseful": "Writers involve readers primarily by building suspense"; "tension draws us into a story making us nervous about what might happen" (34).
Implied in these comments is the notion that there is tension and suspense in the tale at hand and that the writer has only to find it in order to relate her story effectively. But the storyteller's highly subjective view of what the narrative is about affects her perception of the story's climax(es) and its meaning(s), so that even the "shape" that the tale takes is a kind of argument; the organizational pattern of the story tells the reader what the narrator takes to be the main "point(s)" of her experience. Here is another point at which the analytical nature of narrative goes unacknowledged.

A similar problem occurs in Axelrod and Cooper's discussion of the second "basic features" of personal experience narratives. "Scenes and people play an important role in most writing about remembered events," students are told in this section, and these scenes and people must be presented vividly. Thus, students are advised to "move in close" and "name specific objects in a scene"; "to give details of [each] person's appearance"; and to "show people in action." They are further told, "Writers also present people through dialogue, letting us infer from their own words what the people are like and how they feel about one another" (34).

Once more, there is no mention of the fact that the narrator is evaluating her experience in the process of describing it—that she includes some details and excludes others in order to reflect the conclusions at which she wants her paper ultimately to arrive. The myriad choices that she makes as she recreates conversations and depicts behaviors are dictated by her sense of why her experience matters and what it shows about her (as well as her other "characters"). Lively description is not merely a matter of recording the particulars of an incident; it is a highly selective, purposeful process that is informed by the writer's "thesis" for her
narrative, and Axelrod and Cooper do not emphasize this key point as they examine the essential elements of reminiscences.

This lack of emphasis on the analytical nature of narrative seems especially puzzling when one turns to the discussion of a third and final "basic feature" of essays about remembered events, "an indication of the significance" (35). Here, Axelrod and Cooper identify for the student the two different means of indicating the import of an incident: "Sometimes the event's meaning is merely implied; more often the meaning is stated explicitly. There are two ways a writer can communicate this significance: by showing that the event was important or by telling directly what it meant. Most writers do both" (35). The authors go on to explain the differences between "showing" and "telling": "Showing is the heartbeat of an essay about a remembered event, for the event must be dramatized if readers are to appreciate its importance and understand the writer's feelings about it. Telling also contributes mightily to a reader's understanding about the event's meaning and importance.... Often, they [recall] their past feelings and thoughts and [reflect] on the past from the present perspective" (35).

In this passage, the authors do seem to recognize that description is not objective and is instead keyed to the overall message(s) that the storyteller wants to convey to her audience. But this idea is addressed rather indistinctly and very briefly; there is no consideration of how one "dramatizes an event" so as to communicate one's feelings about that event.

As this section of the Concise Guide's chapter on remembered events draws to a close, the greatest concern continues to be with the narrator's explicit assessments of her experiences—specifically, with her concluding the essay artfully and convincingly:
One of the best ways to achieve a credible and cohesive ending for a narrative is to plant the seeds for the final evaluations in the earlier, descriptive passages of the story, through the careful use of connotative language and a deliberate, purposeful arrangement of key scenes. The Concise Guide to Writing does not openly explore this very often, however, but only alludes to the persuasive properties of narration. If this quality of storytelling were more explicitly considered, it would be clearer to students why they are being asked to write personal experience narratives: the connection to argumentation would likely be more visible to them.

Students who rely on the Concise Guide will be led toward a narrow, even misleading, view of narrative. It is true that the "Planning and Drafting" section of "Remembering an Event" advises students to ask themselves, upon finishing and reviewing their brainstorming notes, "Do I have enough descriptive details to recreate the scene and people vividly? What will be the dominant impression of my description and how will it reinforce the event's significance?" (40). However, throughout the "Invention" section of the chapter, description and evaluation are for the most part handled as discrete activities, with description leading to evaluation. For example, the student is instructed to "begin by making a rough sketch [or outline] of the story" and then directed to reread the sketch/outline, "putting an asterisk next to the high point or climax"—the "point" she thinks the story is "building toward" (37). The suggestion here is that the meaning of the story does
not emerge from the telling but is to be discovered after the fact, as the result of a separate act, that of looking over the accumulated material.

Likewise, the more tightly focused portions of the "Invention" section—which deal with "Describing the Scene" and "Recalling Key People"—treat analysis as something that stems from, rather than works in tandem with, description. For the most part, these passages contain long lists of questions designed to call up the kinds of sensory details that "create vivid images" (37-38). The last group of questions in the section on "Describing the Scene" concludes, "Now that you've imaginatively re-created the scene or scenes in which the event took place, write a sentence or two saying what dominant impression each scene should evoke. Should they seem homey? eerie? holiday-like? claustrophobic? Should every scene evoke the same mood?" (38). And the "Recalling Key People" heuristics end on a similar note: "Finally, try to focus your thoughts about the key people in a sentence or two about your relationship with each of them and the role that each one played in the event" (38). Once more, there is the implication that evaluation can take place only after the details have been gathered—that the gathering itself will not prompt reflection and/or constitute a drawing of conclusions.

Yet another separation of description and analysis occurs just before the "Invention" section ends and the "Planning and Drafting" section begins—there, "Exploring the Significance" is given a special section all its own. This passage begins with the statement, "Following are some questions designed to help you better understand the meaning the event holds in your life" (39). This remark gives the impression that the student's earlier efforts at reclaiming the particulars of the
incident have not themselves been laden with her ideas about how and why her experience matters to her.

The rest of the passage on "Exploring the Significance" asks questions that prompt the student to consider the feelings she had about the incident at the time of the occurrence and at the present time, as she is recollecting it. These questions culminate in a paragraph headed "Defining the Significance"; it reads: "In a sentence or two, state the significance of the event. What importance does it hold for you? What does it tell you about yourself? Then think about your readers and purpose. In another couple of sentences, explain why you've chosen to share this particular event. What, specifically, do you want your readers to think about you and the situation you were in?" (40).

This set of queries—and their placement at the very end of the "Invention" section—seems to operate from the assumption that the student has not been considering all along the meaning(s) she attributes to the experience. But her initial sense of what she wants her readers to think about her and her experience has likely guided her as she has sought to capture "key scenes and people" on paper; the details she has been able to recall have to some extent been colored by what she has already determined about the event and its significance. She will no doubt ascribe new meaning(s) to the incident as she explores it for the purpose of writing about it—but she has not been working objectively until this point, as the "Defining the Significance" questions subtly suggest she has.

**Argumentation and Persuasion Guidelines**

Four other modes of writing are discussed in the chapters that follow "Remembering an Event" in Axelrod and Cooper's *The Concise Guide to Writing*.
"Explaining a Concept," "Justifying an Evaluation," "Arguing a Position," and "Proposing a Solution." Interestingly enough, there is virtually no mention of personal experience writing in these chapters; narrative basically disappears from view.

Throughout the chapter on argumentation, for example, the authors talk about the writer's opinion as if it is not inexorably linked to her relevant experiences (and her knowledge of others' relevant experiences). In fact, "Arguing a Position" begins with a statement that explicitly divides narrative from persuasion: at the outset of the introductory section of the chapter, Axelrod and Cooper write, "When you take a position, your aim is not primarily to express yourself (as in Chapter 2)...but to justify your views..." (120).

This statement oversimplifies in many ways. Of course, any time someone asserts an opinion she is expressing herself. And more importantly, when someone justifies her views on a particular topic, she is drawing on what she has felt and witnessed in specific situations. Even when she is considering matters of which she has no first-hand knowledge, she is drawing on her experiences of the media from which has gained information on the topic—books, newspapers, television, conversation with other people, etc.—so that any time she is offering and justifying her views, she is implicitly telling stories of her experiences. It seems to me that the distinction being drawn here is false one and that students would be better served by a discussion that ties their earlier work (narration) to their later work (persuasion).

As the introduction to "Arguing a Position" goes on, the notion that our views exist independently from our personal experiences is implied once again. "Although we may feel very strongly about our opinions," write Axelrod and
Cooper, "there is seldom a simple right or wrong answer in controversies." They go on to explain that

Opinions depend to some extent on facts, but they also depend on less objective factors such as values and principles. To be convincing, an argument must not only present logical reasons backed by solid evidence; it must also be based on shared values and assumptions. (120)

These remarks insinuate that one can reason in a vacuum, without reference to occurrences and encounters from her past; they do not explicitly grant the fact that the individual’s personal values, principles, and assumptions derive from the stories she tells and the stories others tell her over the course of her lifetime, to create a set of shared values and assumptions. The commentary that follows these statements conveys a similar impression:

Writing a persuasive position paper is intellectually challenging. It requires you to look critically at your own thinking and to understand others' points of view. You must separate opinion from fact, reason logically, marshal supporting evidence, and recognize the values and beliefs underlying your own and others' opinions. (120)

There is no mention here of the personal narratives that underlie one’s opinions—no consideration of the fact that as one lives an experience or follows someone else’s tale of an experience she is assembling a story that will inform her future actions and reactions to the events taking place around her. (Interestingly, there is no statement like the above in the chapter on “Remembering an Event”; this lack seems to suggest (wrongly) that narrating an experience is not particularly challenging to one’s intellect.)
Again and again throughout the chapter on “Arguing a Position,” The Concise Guide to Writing ignores chances to stress the fact that one’s personal experiences (and the experiences she gains from others when they talk about what they have experienced) color—and, in fact, ground—many of her opinions and values. In their commentary on sample argument papers, Axelrod and Cooper continue to discuss persuasion as if it somehow derives from a rather impersonal process. Introducing a sample essay on how talk shows might “foster and/or disrupt public debate,” for example, they write,

Before reading the essay, reflect on the talk shows you have seen on television or heard on radio, such as those moderated by Rush Limbaugh, Oprah Winfrey, or G. Gordon Liddy. Do you usually think of these shows as contributing to the national debate on important issues?” (126)

Here is an obvious opportunity to demonstrate that what one sees and hears firsthand shapes one’s views. But the exercise moves so quickly from particular experience to generalization that the reader might not pick up on the fact that the former leads to the latter. The same problem occurs after the reading on talk shows, where Axelrod and Cooper direct the student to “[s]elect one issue [concerning the media] on which you have a position. What assumptions have led you to choose this position? How might you...construct an argument based on some of your assumptions?” (129). Here, too, they inadvertently create the impression that assumptions somehow arise on their own, without reference to personal experience.

This is not to suggest that personal experience stories go entirely unmentioned in the Axelrod and Cooper’s directives for “Arguing a Position”; there are references to such narratives throughout the chapter. In "Choosing an Intriguing Issue" (part of the "Invention" section), they note,
Your choice may be influenced by whether you have time for research or whether your instructor requires it. For example, you would have to research affirmative action programs fairly extensively before you could adequately define a position and argue it well.... Other issues...may be approached more confidently from personal experience and limited research. (138)

And in a section on "Setting Goals," they suggest that the writer ask herself, "Can I draw on any common experiences that relate to this issue? Could I share my own experience...?" (143). Still, whenever these authors do mention personal experience narratives, they carefully warn students not to rely on them too heavily. In the portion of the chapter on arguing devoted to "Basic Features of Position Papers," there is a section on "Sound Reasoning and Solid Evidence": "A writer can cite various kinds of evidence in support of a position, including anecdotes, authorities, and statistics. Anecdotes are used to bolster and to illustrate an argument. Testimony from authorities—people especially knowledgeable about the issue—also enhances the credibility of an argument" (137).

Sections on “Choosing an Issue” and on “Anticipating Readers’ Concerns” both contain material that clearly points students in the direction of personal writing. Yet the discussion always stops short making direct reference to narration and the use of firsthand knowledge in the construction of an argument. For instance, an early invention exercise recommends taking an inventory of appropriate topics: "Begin by making a list of issues you might want to write about ... . Include both issues on which you already have ideas and ones you do not know much about but would like to explore further" (138). Many of the sample questions that follow would obviously draw on personal experience:
Should the primary purpose of a college education be job preparation? Should schools attempt to teach spiritual and moral values? Should extended training in music performance or art making (drawing, painting, sculpting) be required of all high school or college students? Should college admissions be based solely on academic achievement? Should colleges provide day-care or night-care services for students taking classes? Since fraternity hazing practices have caused injuries and even deaths, should fraternities be banned from college campuses?” (138)

One might expect the authors to suggest that the student freewrite about her past experiences with the subjects catalogued here, but instead, the next passage, on “Choosing an Intriguing Issue,” begins only by stating, “Select an issue from your list that seems especially interesting, one that you would like to know more about. It should be an issue about which people disagree” (138).

Also part of the "Choosing" section is the following observation:

[I]f your time is limited or your instructor wants you to argue a position without doing research...[o]ne possibility is to write about an issue currently affecting your community or college. You could define and explore fully issues like these with classmates or friends; and, with care, you could identify a wide range of opposing arguments. (138-139)

And as the discussion moves from selecting a workable topic to “Doing Research,” there is only the subtlest mention of how unfamiliar issues might be approached by gaining experience with them: the authors briefly explain, "If you do not know very much about the issue or the various views on it...[y]ou can gather information by talking to others or by reading what others have written" (139). What others say or write might be based on their own experiences, and might therefore become, in a way, the experiences of the student, but this fact is not addressed. If it were, the St.
Martin’s Guide would perhaps be making the research process less mystifying to its readers.

An excellent exercise closes the section titled “Developing Your Reasoning.” It calls upon the student to discuss the experience of building a case and attempting to persuade an audience of a claim’s validity:

At this point in your invention work, you will find it helpful to get together with two or three other students to try out your argument and get their advice. Present your arguments to each other in turn: define your issue and describe your readers briefly and then summarize your argument, focusing on the reasons for your position. Help each other think of further reasons and support for the reasons. Also, anticipating your next task, think of objections readers might have to each argument. (141)

This activity could easily lead to a profitable kind of metanarration by which several students would share with their peers their stories of developing their ideas and finding evidence with which to back their assertions. They would, in the words of Donald Braid, “literally be learning” how to write “from one another’s experiences” (see Chapter 2).

However, when Axelrod and Cooper turn from the matter of generating support to the necessity of examining counterarguments, they continue to write as though one can draw conclusions and formulate opinions in an impersonal fashion, without considering stories from her own past and the pasts of the people whose experiences she has learned about. Thinking of opposing arguments often does require one to draw on personal experiences, but this phenomenon is addressed almost imperceptibly: "Begin by listing all the opposing arguments and objections to your argument you can think of. You will almost certainly have discovered some in researching the issue and talking with others about your plan" (141). This same
idea, that attitudes and opinions can be dealt with on a fairly abstract level, is reinforced in sections on "Accommodating Readers' Concerns" and "Refuting Readers' Objections": "Review your list of opposing arguments and objections to your argument, and decide which of them you think you should change your argument to accommodate.... Briefly explain why you are conceding [each] point" (141); "Review the list to find opposing arguments you can refute.... Try to explain why you do not find the objection[s] convincing" (142).

At the very end of their chapter on "Arguing a Position," Axelrod and Cooper miss one last chance to deal with the notion that personal narrative can be useful to the writer of persuasion papers. In a segment called "The Writer at Work," they trace the development of a student paper titled "Children Need to Play, Not Compete." Its author, Jessica Statsky, solves a number of writing problems by describing her own experiences. As she prepared to draft her paper, we are told, "Statsky decided that she could accommodate readers by conceding that competitive sports can sometimes be fun for children" (150). We then see a passage from Statsky's invention notes:

It is true that children sometimes enjoy getting prizes and being recognized as winners in competitions adults set up for them. I remember feeling very excited when our sixth-grade relay team won a race at our school's sports day. And I felt really good when I would occasionally win a candy bar for being the last one standing in the classroom spelling contests. But when I think about these events, it's the activity I remember as the main fun, not the winning. I think I can concede that winning is exciting to 6-12 year olds, while arguing that it's not as important as adults think. (150)

Statsky's brainstorming notes are quoted again to show how she figured out a refutation for an opposing argument:
It irritates me that adults are so eager to make first and second
graders go into training for getting and keeping jobs as adults. I don’t
see why the pressures of adults need to be put on children. Anyway,
both my parents tell me that in their jobs cooperation and teamwork
are the keys to success. You can’t get ahead unless you’re effective
in working with others. Maybe we should be training children...in
the skills necessary for cooperation, rather than competition. (150-
151)

Yet in their remarks on Statsky’s invention notes, Axelrod and Cooper say only,
"While this invention activity did not produce sentences [Statsky] could use in her
draft, it advanced her a giant step in thinking about her readers and purpose and
brought an early, productive focus on her library research" (151). They do not call
attention to the fact that she is using personal experience narrative here to
understand the issues, formulate research questions, and frame her
arguments—although the illustrations are a good start. And all this material appears
late in the chapter; the usefulness of narrative could have been stressed throughout
the earlier parts of the chapter, so that there wouldn’t be in those early passages the
inference that we "just have our opinions."

Throughout their discussion of argumentative papers, the authors of the
Concise Guide to Writing make only the slightest references to narrative, despite the
fact that it implicitly runs throughout virtually any persuasive essay. Axelrod and
Cooper treat personal experience stories as devices appropriate to the preliminaries
of argumentative discourse ("How can I engage readers' attention immediately?
Should I use ... a personal anecdote ... to draw readers into the argument?" [143])
or as material that can sometimes supplement “real,” more “objective” information
(one “provide[s] solid evidence—respected authorities, facts and statistics from
reputable sources—to convince readers”; “anecdotes,” on the other hand, can be
used to “show how [one] reason relates to [another]” [148]). Finally, narrative is always placed in a kind of subservient relationship with argumentation; personal experience stories are always handmaidens to persuasion. If the two were regarded more equally, students might not approach “thesis-and-support” writing with such trepidation, for they would see this type of discourse as on a par with something they practice continually as they go about their daily lives.

Other “Rhetorics”

Axelrod and Cooper’s St. Martin’s Guide to Writing and the condensed version of it, the Concise Guide to Writing, set the standard for college composition textbooks; these two rhetorics are high on the list of best-selling textbooks for first-year writing classes. As a result, nearly every other publisher of beginning composition materials has an extremely similar volume on the market.

Imitators closely mimic the Axelrod and Cooper texts in approach and in organization: after an introductory section on the stages of the composing process in general, each of these books takes the student meticulously through the process of writing particular types of papers. The emphasis here is not on the modes themselves, however, but on the procedure for fulfilling their various requirements; as in Axelrod and Cooper, the emphasis is on activity. The names of the chapters set the tone: guidelines for writing descriptive essays fall under titles like “Portraying People, Places, and Things”; illustration is “Explaining with Examples”; comparison and contrast is “Showing Similarities and Differences”; etc.
Also as in Axelrod and Cooper is a treatment of narration as separate from argumentation and persuasion. The texts that follow the lead of the St. Martin's Guide to Writing and the Concise Guide to Writing all begin their "modes" sections with suggestions for writing that is "remembering an event," and all then basically drop the subject—except to mention that narrative can sometimes service other types of discourse. The Bedford Guide for College Writers (4th edition), by X.J. Kennedy, Dorothy M. Kennedy, and Sylvia A. Holladay, for example, begins its chapter on "Writing from Recall" with these comments:

Writing from recall is writing from memory, the richest resource a writer has, and the handiest. Novelist William Saroyan said that a writer observes—and then remembers having observed. This is clearly the case in an English course when you are asked to write of a personal experience, a favorite place, a memorable person. But even when an instructor hands you a subject that at first glance seems to have nothing to do with you, your memory is the first place to look. Suppose you have to write a psychology paper about how advertisers play on consumers' fears. Begin with what you remember. What ads have sent chills down your back? . . . All by itself, memory may not give you enough to write about. But whenever you need to start writing, you will rarely go wrong if you start by jotting down something remembered. (15)

Although the chapter goes on to "invite" the students "to write a whole paper from recall" (15), a subtle but unmistakable message is being conveyed here: English teachers might call upon students to recount their experiences as an exercise, but when it comes to substantial writing, narrative is merely a heuristic—a tool for getting at more significant material for more sophisticated forms of communication.
This idea is reinforced later in the chapter, under the heading “Applying What You Learn: Some Uses of Writing From Recall.” There *The Bedford Guide* explains,

Autobiographers and writers of informal essays rely extensively on recall. All of us depend on recall in much of our informal, everyday writing—when we pen a letter to friends or family members, when we write out directions for someone who doesn’t know where we live, when we make a diary entry. (28-29)

It is hard to imagine observations that could make narrative writing sound more mundane or trivial. The word “informal” appears twice in this short passage, strongly implying that personal experience stories are not “serious” pieces of writing. The final sentence here has the same effect, aligning personal experience writing with ephemera. These comments clearly imply that the narratives are “special” types of writing, something ultimately to be set aside from the other, more “serious” types of discourse required of students taking college courses.

Kennedy, Kennedy, and Holladay eventually indicate that personal experience narrative can be important rather than trivial: they explain that “recall . . . plays a role in writing for classes other than English. Even when you are asked to investigate, to analyze, to explain, or to argue, you can sometimes use personal experience as support for exposition and argument” (29). They then demonstrate how a student who had spent a year living and working in St. Thomas “added life and verisimilitude” to a research paper analyzing “cultural difference between the Virgin Islands and the United States” by including a “telling recollection” among the materials she had gathered from books and periodicals (29). They also quote a passage from an article in which Stephen Jay Gould “makes effective use of recollection to ease his readers into a seven-page essay on a challenging subject”
(29). And as the guidelines for "Writing From Recall" draw to a close, Kennedy, Kennedy, and Holladay offer one last list of rhetorical situations in which personal reminiscences might come into play:

A student who has worked in a day-care center can add vigor and authority to a sociology paper on day care in the United States by including a few pertinent illustrations based on that experience. An economics paper about the recent growth of the fast-food industry could benefit immeasurably from an incident remembered from harried days behind the counter at a McDonald’s. If you grew up in the inner city, your recollections might lend enormous impact to a paper arguing for or against a particular city planning proposal. (30)

Each of these three discussions downplays the significance of narrative writing, however, even as it appears to seek to give such writing credibility. The tone of these passages at times seems rather strained, as if the authors are reaching a bit to justify the teaching of the personal experience story at the university level. The examples framed with reference to student writing are all careful to point out that personal anecdotes are appropriate additional material but cannot alone provide the foundation for an argument, will not on their own be persuasive. And note that Stephen Jay Gould’s personal experience narrative is considered merely a “warm-up” act, a “pre-show” entertainment that simply introduces the subject of the feature presentation. The perception that Gould’s first-person story “eases” the reader into the more difficult portion of the scientist’s article is a telling one; it perfectly captures the attitude that college rhetorics tend to take toward personal experience writing. The “real,” primary work of college students is impersonal argumentation,
according to so many of these texts, and narrative is a secondary type of discourse that in one way or another serves the needs of the more important forms of writing.

In their final two paragraphs on narration, the authors of The Bedford Guide reflect the make-up of the entire chapter. They comment, “Recall is probably the major resource for writers in all professions and from all walks of life . . . . These writers look back over important events in their lives and interpret how the experiences have influenced them” (31). The remarks here might hint at the idea that a personal experience story can be construed as a type of argument all on its own. But this concept is never really explored, and the dominant impression left by the chapter is that recall is useful only for supplementing “factual” evidence or as a means of “getting started”:

For an academic writing assignment, you usually have to research your subject in some depth before you can write about it. You need to rely on resources other than memory. Yet even as you approach such an assignment, you can begin by writing down your own relevant experiences. Whether or not you will use them in your finished paper, they can help direct your research. Often you will use them . . . in conjunction with more academic sources. (30)

College Writing, to name just three examples. Nearly every textbook that strives to garner a share of the first-year composition “market” opens with a chapter that takes a fairly cursory look at the elements of telling stories well. And throughout this early chapter such texts repeatedly caution students that personal experience stories for the most part are not an adequate basis for a credible, compelling academic paper. There is almost always a suggestion that narratives are valuable only when they are offered to bolster more “objective” evidence and hardly ever a consideration of the idea that a narrator postulates an argument whenever she constructs a story.

A few more recent, more innovative volumes place a bit more emphasis on the constitutive nature of narrative. Among them is Andrea A. Lunsford and John J. Ruszkiewicz’s Everything’s an Argument, which begins from the assumption that “all language . . . is persuasive, pointing in a direction and asking for a response” (iii). But even this otherwise excellent book fails to explore singularly narrative discourse as a means of asserting and defending a “case.” It includes “a presentation of arguments in diverse genres, including essays, poems, advertisements, cartoons, posters, Web sites, and other electronic environments” (iv), but personal experience stories are the main focus only in a short (one-page) section of a chapter on “What Counts as Evidence.” There, the authors echo the words of the more traditional first-year writing textbooks:

[Pr]ersonal experience can serve as powerful evidence if it is appropriate to the subject, to your purpose, and to the audience. Remember that if it is your only evidence, it probably will not be sufficient to carry the argument. Nevertheless, it can be especially
Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz's comprehensive book elegantly demonstrates how complex, varied, and subtle the argument can be. It is just the sort of text that might use an examination of narrative's "machinery" to help students gain access to the difficult work of taking and defending a stance on an issue.

Conclusion

In "The Uses of Binary Thinking: Exploring Seven Productive Oppositions" (part of the 1994 collection Taking Stock: The Writing Process Movement in the '90s), Peter Elbow considers deconstruction's "strong criticism of [the] tradition of seeing things in terms of opposites," a criticism which stems from the view that "binary thinking almost always builds in dominance or privilege—sometimes overtly and sometimes covertly" (179). Elbow contends, however, that not all oppositions imply one concept's superiority over the other, claiming "this critique applies [only to] one kind of binary thinking" (180).

"There are really two traditions of binary or dialectical thinking," (180) Elbow asserts, and only the Hegelian tradition "uses binary thinking as a motor always to press on to a third term or higher category representing a transcendent reconciliation or unity" in which thesis and antithesis are harnessed to yield synthesis" (180). In this system, "there is always a single 'answer' or 'winner'" (180).

What Elbow wants to point out is "another, perhaps older tradition of binary thinking that sees value in accepting, putting up with, indeed seeking the
nonresolution of the two terms"; this older tradition does not feel the opposites must be reconciled (180). The goal of this view is to avoid the integration of opposites; it believes that we come closest to the highest or deepest knowledge when we try to hold in our minds propositions that are irreconcilable (180). Oppositional thinking that operates in this (Neo-Platonic) tradition "can serve to encourage difference, nondominance, nontranscendance..."; Elbow therefore argues against framing issues so that we ultimately arrive at a "simple, single truth". It is his opinion that we benefit most from seeking "situations of balance, irresolution, nonclosure, nonconsensus, nonwinning" (181).

For Elbow, "the question is not whether to deal with dichotomies, but how to deal with them," and he determines that there are "basically five options" for dealing with binary oppositions (which are, after all, "inevitable in human perception and thinking," since they provide "the easiest way to classify complex information"). As Elbow outlines them, the five options are 1) engaging in "either/or" thinking and choosing one side as "right or better"; 2) working out a compromise or dialectical synthesis—finding a third term; 3) denying that there is any conflict between the two sides; 4) "affirm[ing] both sides of the dichotomy as equally true or necessary or correct"; 5) reframing the conflict so there are more than two sides (181-182). The fourth option is that most favored by Elbow—it expresses the crux of his thinking and is the position he argues throughout the article. (The fifth option he deems "another good path," but he declines to explore it in this essay.)

To "illustrate the usefulness of [a] balancing kind of binary thinking" (182), Elbow examines a series of oppositions that are regularly encountered by composition teachers. As he considers each dichotomy, he strives to demonstrate the problems with taking the first three approaches listed above and then shows the
value in utilizing the fourth approach. We encounter Elbow's seven "productive oppositions" when we are writing (generating vs. criticizing); when we are teaching (helper vs. adversary); and when we are thinking/learning (doubting vs. believing). We also meet them when we weigh teaching vs. research, form vs. content, reading vs. writing, and private vs. social.

To show how tension can be productive, Elbow painstakingly interrogates each of the above oppositions. In looking at the kind of conflict that "lies at the heart of the teaching process," for example, he discusses the fact that we are simultaneously asked to be "good hosts and good bouncers" with students (185). That is, we must function as "allies or helpers" to students and invite them into the learning community, at the same that we must "criticize what is wrong [and] reject what is unsatisfactory"; "teaching...is a recursive blending or alternation of two conflicting dimensions: opening the gate wide and keeping the gate narrow" (185).

The helper vs. adversary conflict is unavoidable, according to Elbow. And compromise or reconciliation are not possible: "It's no good only welcoming students and never critically examining their work. It's no good only criticizing wrong answers and never welcoming [students] and their risk-taking and their perplexity" (186). Nor is attempting to find a "happy medium" a viable option for resolving the conflict: "being only sort of helpful or inviting to students and only sort of vigilant as to whether they do decent work" (186) would not likely result in their learning a great deal about writing. Rare is the teacher who manages to be "extremely tough and inviting at the same time," Elbow says; thus, he believes the best way to cope with the conflict is to "[find] ways to separate the two stances" (186). He recommends holding the two roles in "creative tension"—"moving back
and forth between points on the continuum, "finding times to be especially inviting and encouraging and other times to be especially vigilant" (186).

I agree with Elbow that there are times when binary thinking can be useful and conflicting ideas are better left unresolved; indeed, I propose that an eighth productive opposition be added to his list: that of narrative vs. argument. As this chapter's examination of several popular composition textbooks should suggest, this dichotomy has been resolved in the past by the placement of narrative in an inferior position and argument in a superior position. In the scheme suggested by first-year writing texts, narrative is an introductory type of writing, one that functions as a "warm-up" for the "real" writing on which the students should spend the bulk of their time.

This notion that narrative can serve as a developmental stepping stone on the way to the more important work of argument/persuasion is implied by the organization of college "guides to writing": personal experience narrative is usually discussed first, in a single chapter—which is followed by a lengthy series of chapters which take up the many different kinds of "thesis-and-support" writing. Also implying argument's superiority over narrative is the fact that it rarely resurfaces in the textbooks' later chapters, those dealing with various sorts of persuasive essays—this despite the fact that narration is a critical endeavor which requires the same type of sophisticated analysis that argumentation does.

To resolve the problem, we might consider the various options Elbow cites for dealing with binary options. We might cease to pit the two forms of writing against one another, engaging in "either/or thinking." This would entail our choosing to teach only narrative or only argument in the first-year writing class. Obviously, this choice is inadvisable. If we make Beginning Composition a course
on narrative writing exclusively, our students will not gain the kind of intensive experience they need in overtly taking a stance and defending a position. Many—if not most—of the courses they will take as they complete their degree requirements will call upon them to argue a thesis explicitly, following American conventions for persuasive discourse. A class that asks novice writers to produce only stories of their experience will not increase those students’ competency with a form of thinking and writing that they will repeatedly be assigned.

Likewise, a class which demands that its members generate only argumentative essays does students a disservice. This course would deny beginning writers the opportunity to perform a kind of task with which they have great expertise (although they are not always aware of this fact) and from which they can derive great pleasure. Even more important, such a course would turn a blind eye toward a key component in how we learn about our culture and formulate our ideas; it would fail to acknowledge the role of personal experience and storytelling in the shaping of the worldviews that are expressed when we articulate an opinion and account for our belief in it. And, of course, “sort of” teaching narrative and “sort of” teaching argument is no better a possibility—students in courses which took this approach would exit such classes where they likely began, with partial or faulty notions of what effective college writing attempts and accomplishes.

As with the oppositions Elbow deconstructs, the opposition between narrative discourse and persuasive discourse is best left unresolved, in my view. If the two are held in creative tension and taught as intricately tied up in one another, students should come away from “English 101” with a strong sense of how analytical writing is conceived and produced. In the chapter that follows, I propose two first-year composition curricula in which narration and argumentation are seen
as two inextricably bound processes that are equally important to critical thinking and writing.
CHAPTER IV: PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Introduction

As I maintain throughout this dissertation, beginning composition courses and students would be well served by an approach to writing instruction that places narrative and argument in a dialogic relationship. Thus, this chapter comprises annotated syllabi for two "narrative-centered" first-year composition courses which I have been developing over the past ten years, first at Ohio State (the large public university in Columbus, Ohio) and then at Belmont University (a small, private, liberal arts school in Nashville, Tennessee). Both syllabi approach the study and practice of "critical writing" through a consideration of personal-experience narrative as it is defined and examined by folklorists. I offer these syllabi not as models of ideal classroom practice but as one means of applying folkloristics to composition practice.
Overview of the Courses

To demonstrate exactly how the above courses operate, Appendices A and B contain the syllabi the students receive on the first day of the semester in the popular culture and gender issues courses.

Each of the syllabi is thematically arranged. One course invites students to investigate "The Politics of Popular Culture." I agree with David M. Weed, who asserts, that a focus on popular culture can be an effective means of "developing students' literacy about the effects of culture on social personality. This kind of investigation makes students more astute writers and, equally important, more astute citizens" (23). As Diane Penrod puts it, "When the content of a college writing course goes pop(ular), significant pedagogical opportunities occur in the classroom. . . . In this kind of classroom, students are encouraged to analyze common objects as representations of dynamic culture(s), using critical methodologies like rhetoric, ethnography, and semiotics to question the kinds of knowledge present in their worlds" (1).

The other course asks students to consider "The Politics of Gender." As Laura Egendorf notes in her introduction to Male/Female Roles, girls, women, boys, and men are incessantly bombarded with cultural messages; when we ask students to identify and evaluate such messages, we are providing them with a ready opportunity to hone their critical abilities (9-14). The first assignment sequence requires students to work periodically in small groups on short-term, in-class activities but ultimately demands that they write four papers individually. The second syllabus is centered on a long-term collaborative research project.

Both syllabi begin with assignments that explicitly require narrative and build to research projects whose writers must perform increasingly sophisticated
analytical tasks. These later assignments are broached in terms of narrative, drawing on concepts that are established in the work on the early narrative essay; indeed, the students are encouraged to see their research papers as constituting "implied narratives." This approach seems to aid them in achieving a clear understanding of the workings of argumentative writing.

Time Frames and Settings

Each of the syllabi is designed for a sixteen-week semester in which the classes meet three times per week, for fifty minutes per class session, in a networked, computer-enhanced classroom, as these are the conditions under which I have most recently (and most successfully) taught the courses. However, I believe these assignments and course schedules are easily adapted to classes that meet twice a week over the course of a ten-week quarter—I have followed these syllabi under such circumstances. And while computers are not essential to the success of these syllabi, they do make certain class activities more effective and efficient; therefore, the plans below sometimes call for their use. Again, however, the syllabi can be adapted to the non-networked, "computerless" classroom.

Textbooks and Reading Assignments

Both syllabi require students to draw on material from three types of textbooks. Each of the projects assigned by the syllabi below asks students to begin by consulting a "rhetoric." For general advice on the writing process and descriptions of various types of academic writing, these syllabi make use of a best-
selling text, *The Concise Guide to Writing*, 2nd edition, by Rise B. Axelrod and Charles R. Cooper. I selected this text because it shares the aims of the courses described below: it is "process-oriented" and seeks to demonstrate the importance of critical thinking and writing to successful college work; it calls upon students to read analytically, plan their essays systematically, get critical comments on their rough drafts, revise thoughtfully, and reflect on their learning (xiii). Although it does not openly call attention to the fact that narration can be seen as argumentative (see Chapter 3), it does provide useful guidelines for the different types of assignments that the "narrative-centered" syllabi require—especially the papers in which the student is "Explaining a Concept" and "Justifying an Evaluation."

Students are also required to buy a handbook, Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors’ *The Everyday Writer*. This text is used primarily for instruction in grammar, mechanics, and style.

The third textbook for each course is a thematic "reader." The popular culture course makes use various pieces from Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon’s *Signs of Life in the USA*, 3rd edition, while the gender issues course draws material from Laura Egendorf’s *Male/Female Roles* (a book in the “Opposing Viewpoints” series), recent newspapers and magazines, and a number of anthologies that contain "units" of readings on appropriate gender issues. At the outset of each project, the students read essays in which professional writers address subjects similar to those that the course assignments require the class to investigate. The readings from the essay collections are also like the students’ papers in genre: before writing personal experience narratives, the students read personal experience essays in the textbook; likewise, before writing analytical or persuasive papers, the students read analytical or persuasive essays from their anthology.
I do not offer the professional essays as models for the students' work because when they are used as such, students tend to feel intimidated and are hindered rather than helped in their efforts to produce clear writing. Rather, the reading and discussing of essays by accomplished writers serves to open a dialogue on the subject of the writing project that is about to commence.

Writing Assignments

This brings me to the two different types of writing that the students produce throughout the semester. In both the popular culture and the gender issues courses, the students are required to produce a series of "Reader Responses"—short, "informal" essays that are akin to journal entries—and a series of four longer papers, each of which is taken through at least two rough drafts. The two kinds of assignments are complementary to one another, and both rely on narrative, in a variety of ways.

Grammar and Mechanics

Grammar and mechanics are not a primary focus of these courses. Such matters are given secondary consideration and, for the most part, are addressed in context, as the students are drafting their papers. When I read early drafts of their work, I attempt to look for each writer's "trademark errors" and try briefly to explain how to spot and correct the kinds of mistakes that occur with some frequency. I might provide this brief explanation in writing, or I might suggest that the student see me in my office for it. A few in-class discussions of sentence-level concerns might be warranted; the need for whole-class "grammar lessons" can be
determined at the beginning of the semester once the students have submitted their diagnostic essays and a few of their “Reader Responses.” Generally, I hold editing sessions for the entire class just before the final drafts of Projects One and Two are due. At that point, I tend to review the rules that dictate sentence boundaries and matters of “agreement,” as these tend to be the leading causes of awkwardness and confusion in so many beginning writers’ prose. I conclude these editing sessions by telling my students that I will hold them accountable for finding and eliminating any of the “Twenty Most Common Errors” that are addressed in their handbook, The Everyday Writer.

Overall, my attitude on matters of grammar and mechanics are in line with those of Marilyn B. Demario, who writes in Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts that “most students cannot learn to care about correctness of the sentences they write until they care about what they say and how they say it”; “Punctuation, syntax, capitalization, spelling, paragraphing—the usual subjects of a writing class—are talked about as an integral part of the writer’s effort to articulate [her] ideas in writing in a way that makes sense to [her] and others” (97).

The Instructor’s Stance

It is crucial that the instructor of politically charged classes assume as neutral a position possible toward the issues raised in and by those courses. It is imperative that she not present herself as someone whose mind is already made up on the subjects about which the students are reading and writing. Should she
convey the attitude that she perceives herself to be a shaper and/or dispenser of politically correct views, she may find herself with a largely unreceptive audience that can quickly become hostile.

To avoid the kinds of problems Maxine Hairston forecast for the politically charged classroom (see Chapter 1), the teacher must not come into the course proclaiming the current pop cultural terrain a “wasteland,” nor can she preach for women’s rights and decry the past several centuries’ male oppression of females. If she is going to require her students to be open to thinking about new topics in new ways as they begin to analyze cultural politics, the teacher must demonstrate her own openness. The success of the courses outlined below stemmed in large part, I believe, from the fact that I immediately established myself as a fellow investigator of gender issues and popular culture’s influences on the public. Cautioned by the experiences of colleagues who have approached gender politics evangelically—to frustrating, if not disastrous effect—I make a point of telling my students early and often that I am myself an ever-developing “reader” on such matters and want to learn from what they have seen, felt, and done. I think it is probably clear that I am not likely to be persuaded toward sexism. But I hope I convey the attitude that I am willing to try to understand where people with unpopular views might be “coming from.” I have learned that the students’ stories must truly be at the center of class discussions for these syllabi to engage and excite their “users.”
Encountering Resistance

No matter how carefully I try to position myself toward the subject matter of the popular culture course or the gender issues course, I meet some resistance from some students (although, so far, such students have remained in the minority). Some of these students claim that they have no experiences with or opinions on popular culture. When they tell me they cannot possibly write on the subjects I have assigned, I attempt to change their minds by asking them as many questions as I can think of to spark potential paper topics. Often this helps them see that they actually have had encounters with ideas that are related to the class’ theme; it is many times the case that they have simply not reviewed enough of their past experience to determine that they have been involved at various points with gender or cultural “politics.”

It also helps to remind resistant students that they need not write about problems they have had with gender or popular culture. Despite what I tell them at the outset of the semester, some students continue to think of “critical” as meaning “negative.” They seem to think that a “good” paper topic will explore what is wrong in some place or another. If this notion of “critical = disapproving” is a source of resistance, I stress that they are more than welcome to write essays that deal with positive experiences or impressions. I also stress that they need not take on the largest issues or the most complex questions in their essays, noting that smaller matters can lead to fruitful areas of inquiry. And if all else fails, I try to assist the reluctant students in finding topics that are only tangentially related to the
course themes, for they will have a hard time writing well if they resign themselves to working with subjects and ideas that truly do not interest them.

"Reader Responses": Description and Rationale

The assignments termed "Reader Responses" are, for the most part, linked to the essays that the students read in their anthologies. (Only the first of these assignments is linked to material from the rhetoric for the courses, The Concise Guide to Writing.) The label attached to this set of writings is used in a special way—not in the sense by which it is used in literary criticism. In their "Reader Responses," which I also call "mini-papers," the students are called upon not to respond directly to the material they have read; their task is not to summarize what they have read and explain how they have felt about the material. Rather, their job is to apprehend the types of analysis being done in the readings and then to perform that same type of analysis themselves. (I use the term "Reader Response" because of several terms that I have tried, it best distinguishes between the "journal writings" and the drafts of the longer essays that are simultaneously under construction.)

Like the journal entries assigned in many composition classes, the "Reader Responses" are first-draft writing. They are required to be two double-spaced, typed pages in length, so it is necessary for the students to take their thoughts on their subjects into some detail and depth. These "mini-papers" are assigned at the beginning of the students' work on each of their major projects; as I noted above, they serve to introduce the topics of the longer papers and to demonstrate the sort of
thinking required in the process of completing the more substantial essays that are
taken through a number of drafts. Typically, the students complete three or four
"Reader Responses" at the outset of a major project.

Each "Reader Response" is given a letter grade, so the students will take
these more "informal" assignments seriously and invest meaningful time and energy
in their completion. The grades on the "mini-papers" are based solely on content,
however; neither grammar and mechanics, nor is organization is evaluated. As the
general prompt for these assignments (printed in the syllabus that is distributed on
the first day of class) states,

You should answer the questions posed in the "prompts"...as fully
and as thoughtfully as you can, in as much detail as possible. Your
writing in these "mini-papers" need not be as polished as that in your
more extensive essays; you should write as clearly as you can, and
try to organize your thoughts as you respond, but you should
concentrate your efforts on grappling with the issues raised in the
material you've read. Problems to avoid: responses that are too short;
responses that are carelessly composed; responses that are extremely
general; responses that fail to address the assigned topics.

By removing the potential stumbling block of "correctness" from the students' paths,
I hope to foster their engagement with their subject matter and enable them to
wholly devote themselves to gaining insight into whatever they are evaluating.

Indeed, the functions of the "Reader Response" assignments are very like
those of the "learning logs" described by Elizabeth Radin Simons in Student
Worlds, Student Words, the only book to date on Teaching Writing Through
Folklore. First, they "provide an avenue for easy, nonjudgmental communication
between students and teacher" (52). Second, they offer the teacher "an unparalleled
view into what is happening in students' minds as they learn (or fail to learn)" (52).
And third, they "are a place where students can experience the power of writing as a learning tool"—a place where students "make informal, personal connections to content" and "get ideas" (52). In other words, they help students to "internalize" important concepts and teach students to use writing "to solve problems and raise questions" (52).

While the first two purposes listed above are highly significant, it is the third purpose that is most relevant to the discussion here. In their "Reader Responses," the students can—and very often do—write papers that are predominantly narrative in form. Indeed, the more specific prompts for the "Reader Responses" implicitly invite the students to tell stories about relevant personal experiences. For example, one of the "Reader Response" assignments from the popular culture syllabus states,

**Reader Response 5**

Analyze your own apartment or a room in your House, using Joan Kron's essay "The Semiotics of Home Decor" as a model. How do your furnishings and possessions act as "signs" of your identity? What specifically do they reveal about you?

Only with great difficulty could a student complete Reader Responses 5 by writing a detached, non-personal essay. To fulfill the aims of the assignment, the student must produce a personal paper, since the writer must examine her own living environment. Narrative writing thus occurs very naturally in this particular mini-paper (as it does in most of the "Reader Responses" that are assigned earlier in the term; more information on the "Reader Responses" sequence appears below, in the complete outline of the popular culture syllabus).

Many students approach the task here by describing the how they came to adorn their living quarters ("When my roommate and I met, we found out that we both wanted our suite to have a dramatic or sophisticated look. We didn't want
flowers and stuffed animals everywhere"...). Others opt to take inventories of their possessions, but these students, too, tend to slip into a storytelling mode ("I am famous on my floor because of my collection of smiley faces. One day when I was depressed I walked into a record store, where they were selling a poster with a big yellow smile on it. For some reason, it made me feel better, so I bought it...").

Whether they choose to detail the process of expressing themselves through their home furnishings or to reminisce about the occasions on which they acquired the objects that best reflect their personalities, the students are exercising the principles of semiotics, a rather difficult critical theory. The semiotic method is not easily explained to or grasped by first-year writers—but a chance to apply it in an examination of their own lives seems to help the students begin to comprehend it.

When they are given the opportunity to tell the stories about their belongings, the students validate what the author of the assigned reading tells them in more theoretical terms: that "our possessions give us a sense of security and stability," that "today our means of competition is the accumulation and display of symbols of status," that we "use our possessions . . . to communicate with one another" (Kron 75-78), and so on. Afterwards, the students are likely to begin looking at their surroundings in new ways—with an increased appreciation for the notion that all of our cultural constructs are laden with meaning, repositories of our values and beliefs. And an understanding of this concept is crucial to their success in the major projects for the semester.

In composing their "Reader Responses," then, the students are learning by and from the narrative process. Writing segments of their own personal "life stories" helps them comprehend someone's else's analysis of a subject and situates them to accept or reject that other writer's position—and thus it also demonstrates
that anecdotal evidence can serve as support for the kinds of critical claims that interpretation and argumentation entail. As well, narrating their own experiences in their "mini-papers" can give the students a new "lens" through which to see their world: ideally, they will continue testing the ideas posed by the authors to whom they are responding, seeking further validation or refutation for assessments made by those authors. Ultimately, the personal-narrative writing required by the "Reader Responses" introduces the students to a school of thought and a methodology; this writing also inducts them into that community and prepares them to work on more substantial projects in which they pursue their topics from a greater distance, at greater length and in more depth.

**Major Writing Projects: Descriptions and Rationales**

**Project One**

In both the popular culture syllabus and the gender issues syllabus, the first project is a personal experience narrative pertaining to the theme for the course. This first paper is of crucial importance to the course's success, as it is in the work on this essay that key concepts are introduced. At the outset of the semester, the idea that a story implies an argument is stressed in a variety of ways, thus laying the groundwork for the notion that an argument implies a story. This latter idea is then dealt with in the work on the three remaining projects to which the bulk of the course is devoted. The instructor's task as Project One gets underway is to demonstrate that narration and argumentation involve the same kinds of thinking.
and analysis but follow different sets of conventions in terms of organization, diction, etc.

To establish this idea that storytelling is argument and argument is storytelling, the teacher can draw on folklore's analysis of narrative—specifically, its view of the storytelling as a process in which there is a continual interplay of description and evaluation. With the announcement that each student's first essay will recreate a meaningful personal experience, the instructor should begin explaining that a narrator's depiction of an incident is never entirely objective but, rather, is shaped by her sense of that incident's significance. Indeed, the teacher should here indicate that the descriptive process helps the writer find the experience's significance.

As they begin brainstorming for and then drafting their first essays, the students should be shown how the details a storyteller chooses to include (or chooses to omit) set up or point to the conclusions she will draw as her tale comes to a close. Also at this point, the idea that different word choices carry different connotations and establish different tones, thereby producing different effects on the listener or reader, is important.

Effectively handled, the work on the initial paper illustrates that opinions are based on the experiences and observations and feelings of the writer—indeed, are determined when those experiences and observations are discussed with a listener or reader. Moreover, in discussing these ideas, the teacher is establishing the idea that narration and argument can serve similar rhetorical purposes, despite the fact that
they appear to be so distinct from one another in form. Folklore's ideas about
narration as a transaction between teller and listener help the instructor articulate the
value of drafting and the importance of "audience awareness."

All of these ideas are made accessible by folklorists like Sandra Stahl and
Richard Bauman, and sharing their theories of narrative with first-year college
students can provide the composition instructor with a very effective means of
presenting the principles of argumentation and persuasive discourse.

An important byproduct of approaching narrative as folklorists do in first-
year writing class is confidence-building, which can then fuel the later work of the
semester. If the teacher considers narrative in the manner that folklore does, as one
of our most important "ways of knowing," she signals that everyone brings to the
course a high level of expertise in a very sophisticated activity. This can lead to a
lessening of the writing anxiety that impedes success for so many first-year
composition students.

Sample Papers: Project One

To illustrate just what stems from the students' work on their first
assignment, consider the following examples. One young woman who was a
member of a class that completed the popular culture syllabus three years ago wrote
about her reaction to the death of Princess Diana. When Melanie first proposed this
subject, I was worried that she would run into trouble. During a class session in
which she and her classmates shared their topics with one another, she said that she
has always admired the Diana and had been deeply saddened and angered by the
automobile accident that took the princess's life. Melanie's early plans for her
paper made me fear that the resulting essay would be a recounting of Diana's life
and a lashing out at the media, which so many people blamed for the princess's
untimely demise. I cautioned Melanie to keep her focus on her own experiences
and suggested she think of herself as trying to describe what it is like to grieve for a
person one has never met but "knows" via popular culture.

The essay that Melanie ultimately produced, "Farewell to Princess Diana,"
traced the grief process that a "fan" might experience at the death of a beloved icon.
But as this student proceeded through the drafting process, she came to understand
her response to Diana's accident in a way that she hadn't when she embarked on her
project. As she wrote, she realized that she was upset at the princess's passing for
very personal reasons. Her narrative ultimately became a paper about the bonds
between mothers and their children. The essay featured passages praising Diana for
her "common touch" and her "strong identification with the working class" despite
her privileged background. And the paper expressed the view that Diana's difficult
relations with the press played a role in the tragedy that finally befell the princess.
But these remarks were skillfully woven into a story about how the writer became
enchanted with Diana—and in telling that tale, Melanie revealed a great deal about
herself and her relationships with certain members of her family.

After describing how she first heard the news of Diana's death, Melanie
takes her readers sixteen years into the past:
As I watched the news reports [of the Paris car accident], I began to think back about my first exposure to Lady Diana and the Royal Family... I'll never forget my mom and I waking up to watch the wedding of Prince Charles and Lady Diana. We had been following their engagement for weeks, and I was ecstatic when my mom finally told me the big day had come. I was only nine at the time, but I remember I went to bed wondering if Mom would really wake me up. My two sisters weren't as interested and said they would watch the reruns. Mom was true to her word. She woke me at 3:30 a.m., an hour before the actual ceremony began, so we could see all the guests arriving and see Lady Diana's famous glass carriage ride from the palace to the church down streets lined with thousands of well-wishers.

Comparing Diana to Cinderella, Melanie goes on to describe the real-life princess's walk down the aisle, noting that "Mom and I were dazzled by the interior of the church." At the conclusion of the section on Diana's wedding and her early interest in this woman who was destined to become a popular culture icon, Melanie writes:

I distinctively [sic] remember my mother saying, "I want you to pay close attention to what you see and hear today, because this is history in the making. Others may watch the reruns all day long, but you have seen the historical event as it unfolded." As I look back now, I am glad that Mom and I got to share such an event. I remember I looked at her and asked, "Mommy, can I be a princess, too?" She replied, "You can be anyone and do anything you set your mind to. Of course, it may be a little difficult for you to be a princess since we don't run in the same circles as the Royals do, but anything is possible."

She also notes that she and her mother joined the world in following Princess Diana's "triumph and sorrow": "We celebrated with her at the birth of her sons, Prince William and Prince Harry, and we grieved with her through her divorce."

Later in her narrative, Melanie describes watching the Diana's funeral on television, and this scene beautifully mirrors the one in which she views the princess's wedding:  

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From the moment I heard the announcement of Princess Diana's death, I knew exactly where I would be the day of the funeral. It seemed appropriate that since my mom and I had watched as Lady Diana became Diana, Princess of Wales, we should be together as the world said goodbye to her. So there I was tucked into the couch, my mom snuggled into her recliner while my sons slept soundly on a pallet made of quilts. Mom set an alarm for 2:30 a.m. in case we fell asleep.

We awoke to the sound of horses' hooves pounding the pavement as they carried the Princess away from Kensington Palace, her home, for the last time. We watched helplessly as the crowds outside the Palace gates openly sobbed at their great loss. The Princess was now approaching Buckingham Palace, where the Royal Family had stepped outside to witness her casket passing by. The Queen of England did something unheard of. She bowed to the casket as it approached. I wasn't sure how to react to this gesture. In bowing to the Princess, was the Queen sincerely sorry for the treatment Diana had received in the past and overtaken with grief for her grandsons' loss, or was she trying to redeem the Monarchy in the people's eyes?

I think the most touching moment was when Prince Harry and Prince William, accompanied by their father, their uncle, and their grandfather, bravely stepped out and walked behind the gun carriage carrying their mother the last leg of her journey to the church. I don't think anyone will soon forget witnessing the sight of her two sons or the letter simply addressed "Mummy" atop her casket. Perhaps no one has expressed the sense of loss better than her brother, Earl Spencer. In his eulogy he said, "We have lost a sister, a friend, and a humanitarian; but you, William and Harry, have lost your mother, and no one knows what horrible and indescribable pain that must be for you."

Melanie concludes her paper with her own eulogy for her idol: "The world will never forget Princess Diana... She was a new breed of royalty, one that wasn't afraid to touch even the most diseased people. She gave the Monarchy the breath of fresh air it needed after many years of distancing itself from the people."

But she ended the essay by pointing to a more subtle assessment that she develops throughout her narrative: "In our society we have a tendency to observe our
celebrities in such a way that their life stories become our own. Perhaps that is why it is so hard for us to witness the passing of our heroes, because when they die we lose a tiny piece of ourselves.” These last comments pull together a “case” that Melanie has been building over the course of her narrative; she obviously understands that her story portrays an event but simultaneously “argues” an interpretation of a specific kind of experience.

Another young woman who completed the popular culture syllabus also dealt with a tragedy that received international attention in the media. And like Melanie, Jessica began with a focus on a news event but in the end came to a better understanding of her own ethics and beliefs. Jessica witnessed firsthand the aftermath of the bombing that destroyed the federal building in Oklahoma City in 1995, and she wrote a gripping account of the way that news outlets from around the country both helped and hindered the citizens of “OKC” as they scrambled to deal with the devastation left by the bombing. Her paper, “No Longer a Quiet Place,” begins with a scene depicting the peaceful morning that preceded the explosion that cost 168 people their lives:

It was still dark outside when my alarm went off at six a.m. on Wednesday, April 19. I arose from my bed, blindly slipping into my running shorts and tying my shoes. I left the house for the morning not realizing this was the day that would change Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, forever. I met my cross country teammates at Bishop McGuinness high school at 6:30, and we left to run downtown.

Jogging through the streets, beneath the tall buildings of OKC, was one of my favorite morning runs. [My friends and I sometimes] talked of the beauty of the small churches that had been built fifty to sixty years earlier. Oklahoma City was a small, quiet city, a very uneventful place to live. Of course, there were murders
and robberies, but for the most part nothing big ever happened. To
the rest of the United States, Oklahoma City then was an unknown
place—some people actually believed that people [still] lived in teepees in Oklahoma.

After finishing my run I had no idea that this would be the
last time I'd see the church's original colorful stained glass windows.
It would also be the last time I would see the Alfred P. Murrah
Building standing tall. The land of the unknown was to become
internationally known approximately two hours after I ran by the
Federal building.

These scenes of the early morning calm contrast sharply with those depicting the
chaos that Jessica and her classmates watched on television from their classrooms
later that day:

Sitting at my desk, I looked up at the TV screen to see faces
streaked with dark red blood and heard mothers frantically shouting,
"Where is my baby?" Ordinary people, who became heroes, were
carrying children covered in blood to cars that were serving as
ambulances. A man appeared on the television set with a piece of
metal piercing his forehead. As I watched the horror that was
happening only five miles away from where I sat, I thought, "What
type of person could destroy others in this way?" These first images.
. . will never leave my memory. Now when I pass by the site where
the building used to stand, I think to myself, "All those innocent
people killed by a man full of hatred." . . .

I sat next to my classmates who worried if members of their
families were all right, our eyes glued to the television waiting to see
if we knew anyone who had been injured. I was also looking for the
hospital my mother worked in to appear. . . .

One hour after the bomb destroyed the building, we started to
see people running frantically away from the rubble. TV cameras
now showed the ground as reporters and film crew ran as fast as they
could, away from the site. Once the reporters were a safe distance
from the building, they came on again, telling us that a second bomb
was thought to be found and everyone had been told to evacuate the
area. Rescue workers had to vacate the building, leaving people
trapped under huge boulders of concrete screaming for help.

For an hour we knew people were trapped, believing that
another bomb was about to go off. [We imagined them] trying to
hold on, gasping for air, crying, as they waited for another blast. On
the street below the building, television microphones picked up survivors' yelling for help, but no one was permitted to enter the building and save them. When the rescue workers were allowed to return to the building after this false alarm, many of the people they had left alive when they had to abandon the building were now dead. Sadly, the workers marked the spots where the dead lay and continued the search for other live victims. I was horrified at the thought that there could have been more survivors.

As she describes the news coverage that blanketed the networks in the hours after the bombing, Jessica evenhandedly evaluates the reporters’ conduct. As the above passages indicate, she is grateful for the cameras trained on the site of the disaster: the images that are being transmitted to the television audience are horrifying and create great distress for viewers, but at the same time they convey information that answers some of the concerned parties’ most pressing questions.

Over the course of her narrative, Jessica continues to weight the positive and negative aspects of the media’s relentless watch over the unfolding news story. “As the television reports told of damage to buildings as far away as five miles, I wanted to rush and call my mother. But we were being instructed by the reporters not to use the telephones because the lines needed to be free so that the rescue workers and officials could get through to one,” she remarks at one point; at another, she comments, “The media passed on requests from the rescue workers for items such as duct tape, blankets, and flash lights. Stores quickly donated the items, and citizens rushed to the drop-off points leaving items.” In these instances, Jessica sees the media as aiding the rescue effort. But later in the essay, she is irate with certain reporters who in her view interfere with the healing process:
After the final bell rang at school, I drove to Children's Hospital, where my mom worked, wanting to help in any way I could. When I arrived at the hospital my mother put me to work right away. I took food, drinks, blankets and other items to family members who waited while their children were in surgery. While I was tending to the family members, my mother was busy protecting their privacy from the media that had flooded the hospital just hours after the bomb had exploded. It was not local media, but national media, and it was not news media but the talk show media. Out of all the wonderful local heroes who surfaced during this awful disaster, the talk show media were not among them. They pretended to be family of injured so they could get access to the patients' rooms where they would wildly snap pictures of the wounded and of the family members watching in pain next to their children, who were struggling for their lives. They bugged the rooms where families nervously waited for the news of their loved ones. The talk show or tabloid media were outrageous, as this was not a time to infringe on someone's personal life. This was a time to put down the camera, turn off the microphones, and help and comfort the hundreds who were in pain.

Jessica’s paper vividly portrays the complex welter of emotions that attends a time of national crisis, and she offers some astute criticism of the impact the media can have on how a community copes with a catastrophe. And in the process of analyzing the conduct of the various news outlets that raced to bring television viewers dramatic images and exclusive interviews, Jessica is prompted to explore her personal value system. This is evident in her comments on the victims’ right to privacy and in her praise for the people of her city and her state:

I was pleasantly surprised to see the outpouring of help from the community; their actions outweighed the negative actions of the media. I walked into a room where literally hundreds of packages of diapers, wipes, and teddy bears sat for the injured children. Local and national companies had donated and sent all these items for all the children who were thought to have survived the bomb. Food was also donated in mass quantities to the hospital for the families, nurses, doctors and all the hundreds of volunteers. I thought to
myself, "This is a great city with very generous people." . .

Oklahoma City became known as the Heartland of America for the generosity of its citizens. Stores whose doors had been broken and glass fronts had shattered were not robbed. Instead, all Oklahomans pulled together and became one, united in helping the survivors and those who lost loved ones. The bombing changed the level of safety that OKC once had always felt, yet it showed the country the heart Oklahomans had.

It is also evident in the final scene of her story:

As I sat with my mother at 11:00 PM, ten hours after the bomb had rocked Oklahoma City, we saw what was to be the last survivor being removed from the building. I said, "Mom how could this happen here?"

She replied in a low voice, "Awful things can happen anywhere, no matter how safe you try to be. I am just so thankful that no one from our family was injured."

My mom put her arm around me as we watched the last survivor being removed, a thirteen year old girl who had been stuck in the basement for eight hours until she was found. Two hours later, after her left leg had been amputated, she was removed from the building.

I sat there thinking of life as I knew it in Oklahoma City. I had a family to come home to, food on the table; I didn't hear gun shots at night; and, most importantly, I was loved by many. Living in a world where so many bad things occur, I realized how lucky I was. Before going to bed on April 19, 1995, I looked at my mother and said, "Mom, I love you. This awful event has made me realize how much we take for granted."

Like Melanie, Jessica ultimately arrives at a better understanding of herself as she works through her description of her reaction to a calamitous event that has meaning for an enormous number of people. And like Melanie, Jessica shows an awareness that her responses to a particular event constitute an argument for a certain worldview and value system: her rendition of various groups’ responses to the
Oklahoma City bombing clearly and continually states Jessica’s opinions on how people should and should not treat one another.

One example of a personal narrative produced for the “gender issues” course appears in Chapter 1 of this dissertation—Jason’s “Can You Take a Date Fishing?” explores its author’s misadventures on a date with a “Radical Feminist.” Another essay belonging to a student who worked through the “gender issues” assignment sequence was authored by a nineteen-year-old named Steve. Steve was a shy, struggling writer who had taken two basic English courses before he entered my first-year composition class. His first essay for the term was marked by numerous sentence fragments and comma splices, and his prose was not as sophisticated as that of some of his peers. Nonetheless, his paper succeeded with me and with Steve’s classmates because it grappled with important questions. Steve chose to explore how and when “gender expectations” are placed on the individual, for he had determined that his thinking about what it means to “be a man” had from a very young age been shaped in subtle but powerful ways by the adults around him.

Steve’s paper “My Sisters and Me” began with a summary of the problem he would explore throughout his narrative:

After my father passed away, eleven years ago, I was the only guy left in the house, so it became my responsibility to keep an eye out for my three sisters. But why was it my job? It was never appointed to me. [and] I didn’t know what I was doing [;] I just naturally took it upon myself to do the job. I was always under the impression that, as a guy, I had to take on this responsibility. [I believed] that my sisters could not look out for themselves without me because they were women. This was what I thought being a “man” was all about, taking care of my sisters. The only problem was I was only eight years old at the time so no one took me seriously.
The central portion of his paper is devoted to a time when he “actually tried to influence” one of his sisters on who she should date. From his front porch one summer day, he spies his sister with a boy from school (“I quickly became interested in this guy”); he takes it upon himself to track their movements as they make their way down the sidewalk:

I assumed they would come to our house and she would introduce him me and the rest of the family. However, they didn’t. Instead, they stopped... a few houses down. There they stood, talking for about ten minutes, then he went inside and she came home. When she finally reached the steps I began to drill her for information. The things I asked her were not that bad, it was how I asked them. I asked her in true Spanish Inquisition form and she did not like that at all. I asked her, “Who is he? Does he live down the street? When will I get to meet him?” and other questions of this type. She didn’t like me asking all these questions because she felt it was none of my business.

Steve’s sister eventually “breaks down” and tells him the answers to his questions, but in a manner that makes her displeasure with her brother known. Steve apologizes for having been “so nosy.” “She understood and forgave me,” he writes, “but I could tell she was still a little miffed with me.” Nonetheless, Steve maintains an excessive interest in the matter and greatly anticipates the young man’s subsequent visit to the house. Eventually, Steve’s sister’s date arrives to take her to the movies:

The hour of truth finally approached, it was time for Tony to come and pick up my sister. I would have the opportunity to check out this guy for the first time. I tried to keep an open mind, but I had heard all the gossip around school about him. That he had several girlfriends around school... My sister asked him in and then the introductions began. My sister started... with my mother, then progressed to my other two sisters, then to me. While the
introductions commenced I visually made my judgment of Tony. I concluded that Tony was a bit fast... and in general I didn’t like him... There was just something about him that gave me [a bad impression]. It may have been the clothes he was wearing, the way he talked, or the devilish smirk he wore on his face.

"After about ten minutes of small talk," Steve’s sister leaves with Tony for the local theater, and he continues to play the part that he assumed when he first saw the couple on the sidewalk: he paces the floor for five hours, worrying that "something could happen to her and she could get hurt."

Steve depicts himself as an “overprotective father" here, to humorous effect—he knows it is funny that an eight-year-old is judging someone’s date by his appearance and his “attitude.” His tone and diction here also indicate his recognition that we expect people to play certain roles in certain situations and that those expectations are sometimes determined largely by gender. He clearly implies that he behaved as he did mainly because he had seen adult males acting in the same fashion with their daughters. In his conclusion, Steve writes about his sisters’ current feelings about his desire to oversee their activities, indicating in the process that he has reevaluated his paternalistic behaviors and tried to temper them:

... My sisters have mixed emotions about my... looking out for them. They like the security of having someone watch out for them, however, they dislike my overprotectiveness of looking over their shoulder at just about everything they do. I know they don’t like it when I get involved in their business, but I do it anyway because I feel I’m looking out for them and don’t want them to get hurt. I realize now that I have to be less concerned about what my sisters do, and that my sisters can look out for themselves without me.
These final remarks suggest a great deal: that traditionally woman have been treated as though they require the supervision of men; that, in fact, women are capable of seeing to their own safety; that it is difficult to break the habits formed by the expectations our culture places on people according to their genders. While I wished that Steve had addressed these ideas more explicitly (in a more “argumentative” fashion), and that he had explained more fully just what led him to these realizations, his peers and I felt as though he had thought critically about his past experiences and had genuinely come to understand himself and “the politics of gender” in ways that were new to him. (His cohorts and I urged Steve to let us submit a portion of his essay to an English department publication showcasing writing from the computer-assisted composition classes. At first, Steve declined our request to submit his work to the newsletter, saying, “I can’t believe I finally wrote something good,” but he ultimately relented and saw his work distributed among all the sections of English 110. And by the end of the quarter, he was much more confident about sharing his work with me and with his fellow students in the class.)

**Project Two**

For the second paper of the term, the students make a different attempt at asserting and supporting a thesis. Their work on this essay involves their studying a number of related "texts" and identifying patterns within those texts. The fact that the project requires some sort of primary research is crucial, as the resulting papers must then involve description and evaluation that is obviously based on each writer's
own observations and experiences. This paper serves as a "bridge" between personal narrative writing and argumentative-persuasive writing.

In the popular culture syllabus, Project Two concerns advertising. The assignment calls on each student to analyze an array of print advertisements for the same type of products. (One person might look at ads for four different brands of cough syrup, for instance, while another person might examine ads for five different laundry detergents, or six different automakers' minivans.) The prompt for the assignment asks the students how advertisers for their chosen products tend to market the goods—they must decide what is consistent from ad to ad, in other words. The prompt also asks the students to determine what the ads' selling tactics are: they must determine the significance of the patterns they discover. This endeavor, in turn, situates the students to try and assess the assumptions have been made about the consumers who buy the products that are being marketed.

Project Two is a collaborative project in the gender issues syllabus, but it, too, requires the students to look for similarities in a variety of related "texts." In small groups of four or five, the students are employed as ethnographers who must examine gender roles as they are played out in a variety of settings.

One group is asked to focus on the behaviors of men and women in the classroom, while another group is asked to pay special attention to the conversational habits of men and women. A third group is asked to choose a particular social setting (the campus cafeteria, say, or a nightspot that is especially popular with students) and see how men and women tend to behave there; a fourth
group is asked to consider how men and women are portrayed in some facet of popular culture—in television dramas, say, or in the fashion layouts of magazines that college students like to read. (Like the members of the other "teams," the members of this last group must find some way to involve "human subjects" in their research—by having people react to the TV shows or magazines they examine, for instance.)

Once its research has been completed, each group must collectively write a paper that identifies the patterns in its data. Again, the students are also asked to try and account for the patterns that they see, so that they can ultimately link their observations of a specific situation to larger concepts that hold sway in our culture on the whole.

Both of these projects are complex—and thus, both are likely to seem daunting to students. But if the work of this paper is linked to that of the first, it becomes more manageable and less intimidating. Rather than treating thesis-and-support writing as wholly different from narrative writing, I emphasize what is consistent from genre to genre: the fact that both entail the author's description and analysis of what she has seen and felt in response to a particular situation or set of circumstances. By drawing on folkloristics, I can facilitate the students' understanding of what the two kinds of writing share.

The papers that result from Project One make their arguments inductively—the students are told to begin their essays by relating what happened to them on a significant occasion and to conclude their essays by considering why their
experiences mattered to them. With Project Two, the students begin arguing deductively, and I explain the mechanics of assertion-with-proof writing using the terms established in the work on the narrative essay. If work on the personal-experience paper has been couched in terms of argument, I can introduce Project Two by demonstrating that persuasion is simply, essentially the inverse of narration: the writer now begins with her conclusions and works through a description of her evidence to support those claims.

The second paper in the popular culture syllabus works with narrative on a number of different levels. First of all, to reach an understanding of the strategies and techniques employed by each ad, the student must piece together an implicit tale about the character or characters who pose(s) with the product that is being marketed. The models' clothing, facial expressions, and poses serve to indicate whom the sellers have targeted as potential buyers; so do the settings in which the models appear and the texts that are printed alongside the ads' images. These aspects of the ads also serve to indicate how the product will improve the lives of the people who use it. Rare is the ad that does not imply some sort of narrative plot—even that which features a simple slogan on an otherwise blank page can propose a storyline. And when the teacher shows students how to discern the tales suggested by the words and images that adorn their ads, she is reinforcing an idea introduced in the process of completing Project One, the idea that we make meaning—and specifically, build arguments—by telling stories.
Once the student has compared and contrasted a number of ads to determine what claims and strategies are consistent from ad to ad, she can attempt to determine the story behind the ads' creation—can attempt to figure out who the advertisers imagined to be their audience and what the advertisers perceived to be the needs, desires, and/or fears of that audience in order to market the products. The job of the student is to uncover the narratives implied by the ads.

And finally, the second paper the student writes comprises the story of her finding the ads' implied narratives. I explain that the writer's purpose is to take the reader through the patterns she finds, illustrating their existence by describing what she has seen in the different examples she has pooled, and to account for her theories about the ads' tacit messages. As I noted above, Project Two can be presented as an essay in which the student is ultimately telling how she gathered and interpreted her ads.

**Sample Papers: Project Two**

For instance, in his response to the advertising assignment, an usually articulate first-year student named Jeremy wrote about “Shoe Appeal.” He began his essay with an illustration, then announced his thesis:

> Out of the thickly muscled, nude back of a man issues a perfectly defined arm holding aloft a penny loafer as if it were something to be worshipped. From the waist down, the man is a block sculpture of marble; and, from the waist up, he is human—a perfect work of art in either medium. He seems to be deep in contemplation of the shoe resting gently within his hand. The hardwood floor and the three directional spotlighting define irrefutably that this “work” of shoe and man is a prized piece in a
distinguished art museum. The caption at the bottom of the page says, "Cable & Co. The Art of Movement."

As you can see, advertisements for shoes are anything but simple in their efforts to appeal to our insatiable craving to have the very best for our very own. Whether they are selling loafers or cleats, dress shoes or hi-tops, boots or tennis shoes, the advertisers of footwear try to appeal to the snob in all of us. Indeed, by employing a few commonly used advertising tools—lighting, perspective, positioning, and props—shoe advertisements today portray their products as master works of art.

Jeremy makes one astute observation after another in his very unified, coherent paper:

Salvatore Ferragamo, whose shoes appeal to the very wealthy if only by price tag, not only uses . . . lighting and perspective techniques, but also incorporates the use of positioning to make the shoes appear to be art. The picture is black and white. Two black boots that look to be a strange blend of cowboy and combat are balanced carefully one on top of the other. They are lit from the front with a very bright light that reflects off of the highly oiled and polished boots and contrasts the dull, black emptiness surrounding them. The toe of the top boot is stuck down into the neck of the bottom boot, and the necks of both are bent and wrinkled which serves to reflect the light in smooth, zig-zag patterns and show how supple the leather is. Both have wide buckles on the camera side reflecting the light so brilliantly that they appear to be white. As you can see, Ferragamo [does not just portray] his boots as art. Through skillful use of his "tools," he transforms his boots into a sculpture. . . .

Even the logos of shoes have become works of art. Many of the logos look like they could be designs lifted right off of a Picasso or Dali. As late as the early '90s, Nike was the only company with a logo that had an abstract or modern art motif. Nike’s "swoosh" became the forerunner to many of the other modern art shoe logos. In fact you might say that it made a big “impression” on the world of shoes. Even Nike’s arch-rival and nemesis, Reebok, now has a very mod-art logo consisting of two parallel triangles and a perpendicular triangle set across them. Pony has what looks similar to an upside-down swoosh, and I will not even attempt to explain Fila’s new, complicated logo. This logo-art can be seen in dress shoes as well. Cable & Co. has an arching, gothic looking logo, while Stacy Adams
has a very medieval, scrolling “S.A.” Nearly every time period has its art represented by a shoe logo. Although modern art seems to be most prevalent, thanks to J.P. Tod’s logo, even early American tintype is not left out.

Jeremy proves to be an especially discerning reader of the implied narratives shoe advertisements tell. In the section of his paper examining the way props turn shoes into works of art, he writes:

Some shoe makers incorporate props into their ads to give their products the appearance of art. In a current Emilio Franco ad, three shoes are arranged carefully along a marble staircase. The top one is a dress shoe of a very bold mustard color. A matching belt, complete with a gold belt buckle, is draped over the stair above and comes to rest on the toe of the flashy shoe. On the next stair is what looks to be the same shoe in brown; whatever daring is taken away by the conservative color is more than made up for by the elaborate gold trim. The final shoe is a loafer that has a massive pearl in the middle and looks as if it could be made from tuxedo material. All of them are very extravagant and artistic. The caption at the top of the page means to reflect this: “Emilio Franco. Freedom of Style.”

By cleverly instituting the use of props, an ad for Nordstrom footwear even goes so far as to connect their shoes with the works of art themselves. The room is saturated with objects of “high culture.” On a table sits an old copy of Thoreau. It is obviously worn and well read, but the warm browns and greens of the picture give the feeling that everything in the room is cherished and loved. Other old books are carefully arranged on the table in such a way that the titles cannot be seen, but all are very thick and very sophisticated looking. In the background is the corner of an Elizabethan painting from about the same time as the Enlightenment. Could it be that this design is to shoes what the “enlightenment” was to history? Sitting carefully balanced on top of a stack of books is a brown, leather shoe. To its right another similar shoe finds its home on top of Thoreau, and the toe of a brown penny-loafer sneaks its way in to balance the other side of the ad. The shoes are so carefully arranged and lighted that even they, normal department store shoes, seem to be as thought provoking as a compelling work of art.
In each of the above paragraphs, Jeremy takes the reader on a tour of the page containing the advertisement he has chosen to analyze. But he does not only render in words the images that comprise the two ads. His descriptions and evaluations of the ads suggest that he is picturing the potential shoe buyer Franco and Nordstrom apparently target; his tone and diction indicate that he has the lifestyle of the ads’ audience clearly in view as he writes. He has told himself the personal stories that the ads imply and is passing them on to his readers.

Another astute reader of the stories told by the group of advertisements she gathered was Donna, a twenty-five-year-old woman who was returning to college after working for several years. She quite naturally was drawn to ads for goods and services directed toward businesspersons. At the outset of her paper, she writes:

Over the past two decades, our country has taken great pains to ensure that the woman in the work force is treated with respect and given the opportunity to climb the corporate ladder of success. Corporations have issued mission statements, policies, and memos to tell the employees and the public that their companies are indeed equal opportunity employers. And businesses of all sizes have gone to great lengths and expense to prevent any threat of sexual harassment in the workplace, teaching their employees through seminars how to prevent sexual harassment from occurring. In essence, the business world has spent a lot of time and money to eradicate gender discrimination.

So it is ironic that a country which is so concerned with equal rights in the workforce allows business ad campaigns to perpetuate gender discrimination. In business ads men are depicted as powerful, decisive, independent, in control, unfailing, disciplinary, confident, and successful. Women, meanwhile, are constantly depicted as soft, sensual, sensitive, nurturing, maternal, lacking confidence, out of control, indecisive, weak dependent, and subordinate to men. In short, traditional gender stereotypes prevail in advertisements for business products and services.
In the body of her essay, Donna goes on to cite a number of questionable trends. In one passage, she notes:

In its most blatant reliance on sexist notions, business advertising depicts the workplace as virtually devoid of women: the majority of business advertisements do not picture women at all. This suggests over and over again that there are still few women in business; the implied message is that the majority of females are still staying at home to take care of the household and children, still depending on men to provide them and their families with financial security. With the woman's absence from business ads the man is portrayed as the driving force and controller in the business world, as the dominant figure.

In the case of computer advertisements, for example, male models are used almost exclusively. Computer advertisements for youngsters nearly always use males, as in Microsoft's campaign marketing audio and visual learning tutorials for children. This advertisement shows a young boy sitting at his desk with his father to watch as his dad does his work. And computer advertisements for Toshiba use only male body parts—a man's fingertips press the keyboard; a man's hand holds a diskette made by Toshiba. Likewise, IBM's advertisement for the latest "notebook" shows a man sitting in his car and working on his portable computer. In yet another example, an ad for Macintosh graphics software, two men are sitting across the desk from one another, looking at blueprints and discussing how to improve the architectural design of a building.

Like Jeremy, Donna proves to be a perceptive reader of the stories implied by her ads:

In business ads where women are pictured, they are usually in the background, taking less meaningful positions than those of the men shown in the advertisements. The woman is most often portrayed as subordinate to the man. In the realm of these ads she often assumes the role of secretary and is there only to support the men by taking on menial tasks. For instance, in an advertisement for American Airlines, you have four businessmen and a one businesswoman standing in a circle talking to one another as they wait to board a plane. The woman is the only person with a notebook in hand, and she is writing as the three men converse. Why doesn't the woman participate in the conversation? Either she is the men's "personal assistant," taking on the role of working for them, or she is a businessperson who has nothing important to say. A second
ad, for IBM, also illustrates the subordinate role that women typically play in business advertisements. A man is pictured sitting on an airplane working on his laptop computer as a female flight attendant leans over him and offers him coffee. In this ad, you see a businessman utilizing modern technology and a female making sure the man is comfortable while he works so hard.

Some business advertisements do use only female models, but these ads are for business trades that have traditionally been dominated by women. These are advertisements for hospitals or health care facilities. Moreover, the model is usually not the doctor in charge, but the nurse. The purpose for the female model here is to lend personal, emotional appeal to the advertisements. Who better to leave your old, sick grandmother with than a warm, friendly, nurturing woman? In an ad for Jesse Holman Health Services, you see an elderly person being cared for by a nurse. The nurse is holding hands with the patient and offering comfort, showing compassion. This conveys the idea that the female businesswoman is emotional and sensitive. Emotion and sensitivity are not bad except in the "dog-eat-dog" business world. This type of advertising inadvertently shows that the businesswoman cannot compete in the world of "hard ball," that she does better in an environment where she can express feeling and utilize her maternal qualities.

Another example of this can be seen in an ad for Baptist Corporate Health Service, where a young professional woman is pictured; she is giving a testimonial on how well Baptist has treated her employees, which is a priority and concern for her in her work. She is a sensitive "Boss Lady," caring for her employees' health and well-being. The maternal quality of a woman is used as the foundation and basis for this advertisement. But maternal qualities have nothing to do with business. This approach in advertising sends a subconscious reminder that the woman “belongs” at home with her children and family.

Donna’s remarks on the lives of the women depicted in the ads for American Airlines and the two health services providers clearly show that she has put herself in the places of the characters and is telling the implied stories of their lives in order to decode the ads’ strategies and messages. Like Jeremy, Donna seems aware of the ways in which stories persuade and arguments narrate.
The second project for the gender issues syllabus involves narration in a series of different ways. As they are compiling their fieldnotes, the student-researchers are telling the stories of their observations. And later, in order to combine and analyze the data that various individuals have accumulated, group members must tell each other about their encounters with their informants' narratives both comprise the information being shared and serve as the vehicle by which group members begin to negotiate meaning.

As they begin collaborating on their papers, the students "dramatize" the composing process for another: they must complete in front of one another the tasks they generally accomplish privately, sometimes without realizing what they are doing; when they perform these tasks with their peers looking on, and see their peers performing the same tasks alongside them, they gain a greater understanding of what needs to happen when they read and write. (I would argue that this is one of the greatest benefits to having first-year students do collaborative work. I was alerted to this possibility when one of my basic writing students at Ohio State noted in an interview with me, "I learned how to do a paper by watching Debbie [one of his collaborators] work.") In the case of the group projects for the gender issues course, the students are reinforcing a notion stressed in the work on the first paper, the idea that storytelling is a means of acquiring knowledge and formulating opinion.

Once the students in the gender issues course have identified patterns in their data, they can posit explanations for those trends. Like the students analyzing print
advertisements in the popular culture course, these students are called upon to speculate about the causes for the things they see—they also must try to determine the beliefs and traditions that are reflected in the "texts" they are examining. The gender issues students, too, are seeking "the story behind the story."

The second paper written by the gender issues students, like that of the popular culture students, ultimately might be described as the stories of the students' investigations into gender roles as they are played out in some specific situations. The teacher can explain that each group's essay takes the reader along as the different researchers conduct their fieldwork and interpret their findings. Anecdotes from the researchers' experiences depict the behaviors the group members have seen; likewise, they dictate each group's hypotheses about the worldviews and value systems that inform the interactions of the people observed by the student-fieldworkers. As I have stated above, Project Two can be presented to the class as an essay in which the students are essentially telling the story of gathering and interpreting a body of culturally encoded material.

One of the earliest collaborative projects was also one of the most successful. Karen, Heidi, and Brad set out in Spring 1990 to study how men and women tended to behave in some of Ohio State's classrooms. These highly motivated students distributed a questionnaire to their peers and spent an extensive amount of time in classrooms around campus to see if they could detect any patterns in the academic behaviors of their colleagues. They began their paper on their study
by stating some of their research questions and the assumptions they made as they embarked on their project:

What can we learn by observing a class in session? We should be able to gain some kind of knowledge. This knowledge may be in math, psychology, or in other fields of study, but whatever the case we can also learn a great deal about the relationships and differences between men and women. For instance, does one sex display a better attitude toward class, and if so, how? Does this attitude in any way reflect the different roles society deems appropriate for each sex? These are some of the questions we set out to explore.

Before our actual research on classroom behavior began, we collaborated and came up with some points we thought we would find evidence to support. For instance, we thought girls would tend to participate more in class, and that the male would usually have to start a conversation between two individuals of the opposite sexes. We also thought girls would arrive more promptly to class and that people would tend to sit with teammates, roommates, or other individuals with the same common interests. With these ideas in mind, we began our “fieldwork.” We distributed approximately sixty surveys to a random sample of men and women, and most were returned. We also observed a total of six classes, outside of our own, to find our data.

In the paragraph that followed, they summarized their findings and asserted their thesis (using a classic comparison/contrast formulation):

. . . We discovered that in the classroom there is a definite boundary which separates men from women, and certain roles are carried out by each gender. . . . There are many differences between the two genders as displayed in the classroom, but interestingly, there are also some striking similarities. The differences lead us to believe that women [tend to be] more concerned about their education; however, the similarities express that men do indeed show some concern. . . . Even though women outwardly express more concern towards their education, the men do care.

In supporting their thesis, Brad, Heidi, and Karen consistently work to bolster their claims with various kinds of evidence: each of their main ideas is
illustrated with material from their surveys as well as from their observations. This can be seen in the section of their essay that deals with class participation:

In accordance with what we had expected to find, females [said they] tended to participate more in class. Out of twenty-seven females surveyed who answered the question "How many times do you participate in class on the average day (including discussions, comments, etc.)?" forty-four percent of the women said that they participated at least two times on the average day. On the other hand, out of the twenty-six males who answered the same question, only about fifteen percent said they participated twice in class on the average day. Also, fifty percent of the males said they participated in class once, compared to twenty-two percent of the females. However, at the two extremes men and women tended to be more equal. Eleven percent of the females said they did not participate at all, and fifteen percent said they participated four or more times. Similarly, twelve percent of the males said they did not participate and twelve percent said they participated more than four times. According to this statistic, both men and women appear to be equally concerned about their education.

We also noticed that the female tends to ask more questions in class and is bolder when doing so. She is more likely to interrupt the instructor by speaking out, rather than raising her hand. For instance, out of seventeen questions asked in a math class based on discussion, only six were asked by males and only two of those questions were abrupt interruptions. In contrast, females asked eleven questions, and eight of them were by abrupt interruptions. In one particular lecture, a female did not understand a concept, but rather than raising her hand she demandingly said, "What are you talking about?" We think this is a direct result of women wanting an immediate understanding of a concept in order to ensure a feeling of confidence [; thus, women appear] to show a greater concern for their education.

These writers are keen observers of the cultural scenes into which they have entered as researchers—they pay close attention to detail and draw fine distinctions throughout their descriptions and analyses of their data. Their carefully constructed illustrations are obviously the basis for the theories these students build as they
strive to account for the trends that they have spotted. The group’s narratives inform their theories, and their theories inform their narratives.

Attention was again paid to detail and theories were again posited in a lengthy passage on the body language and the informal “chat” that takes place during classes:

In our observations, we noticed discovered many [more] things which reflect different attitudes men and women have towards class. . . . We noticed that males seemed to have poorer attitudes towards class than females. This poorer attitude is expressed by a “less caring” attitude and a more “macho” outlook within the classroom. For example, we discovered that guys tended to slump in their seats, expressing a more relaxed attitude, and that girls seemed to pay better attention during class by sitting upright and taking notes. This attitude displayed by the males can also be seen in their conversations. When males entered the room they were more likely to complain about being there and would say things such as, “I don’t know why I even came today!” [We often noted] that a guy would turn to a girl and say such things as, “What is he talking about?” or “What did he say?” On the other hand, conversations initiated by and between two females were more centered around the class and what was going on. [In one interesting interaction] a female asked, “How did you do on the midterm?” The male answered briefly and then asked, “What are you doing this weekend?”

Several paragraphs are devoted to an incident in which a group of male students direct their “poor attitude” toward their teacher:

In one particular class the instructor had given a test the day before and was planning to go over it with the students. When he began reviewing the questions and presenting the correct answers, the class grumbled loudly. One guy abruptly said, “Where are our tests at? You didn’t hand them back to us!” The instructor replied by telling them that it was against regulations to pass back the exam and that they should take notes on the questions, particularly the ones they thought they had missed. He then proceeded to tell the class he would distribute their scores later.

While all of this was happening, looks of disgust were given to the instructor from both sexes. At this particular moment we
could begin to see that males are much more outspoken when it comes to sarcasm, where females tended to be more ... kind. Most of the females laughed at the instructor, probably because they thought his comments were ridiculous. The males, however, were much more verbal in expressing what they felt. They loudly said things such as, “This is idiotic,” and “This kind of defeats the purpose of testing us, doesn’t it?” Some males cut on the instructor and said, “Man, he is downright queer,” or “This sucks, and he’s stupid.” Of course, all this was talking among themselves, but it was loud enough for the instructor to hear.

Out of all the harsh comments made, only one was made by a female, and it was quite humble compared to the guys’ remarks. She merely said, “How are we supposed to know what we missed?” and her question was directed toward a guy who sat next to her.

With the description of the instructor’s response comes Heidi, Brad, and Karen’s analysis of the situation’s significance:

... The instructor was very upset. He said to his students, “Listen, this is the policy. I’m encouraging you to take notes, but that’s all I can do. If you don’t want to take my advice, that’s your problem, but I don’t wanna hear your complaining! I strongly suggest you take notes on these questions, but from this point on I don’t care what you do. Whether you take notes or not, it doesn’t matter to me!”

After the instructor’s comment some interesting responses began to take place. The majority of the females who were not taking notes quickly picked up their pencils and began to write comments on what [the teacher] was saying. On the other hand, the males kicked back in their chairs, read newspapers, and quietly grumbled about the instructor. [The females’ promptly beginning to take notes] suggests that women are “trained” to be more obedient throughout their lives, especially to men. It appeared that the males were more offended by the instructor’s attitude than were the females. At this moment we began to see that the role of the male seems to carry a lot of pride and ego. It was as if the instructor had in some way hurt the males’ pride. The instructor’s scornful comments seemed to make the males feel as if they were unable to maintain control of the situation, resulting in rebellious behavior.

Another interesting occurrence is described and linked to the paper’s earlier examples a few paragraphs later:
In one particular class, which was female dominated, an instructor asked for volunteers to help with an experiment. Out of all the females in the class, not one volunteered. They left this obvious “leadership position” to the men. However, when it came time to... a situation where an individual could “stand behind the scenes,” females were more likely to get involved by asking questions, taking notes, and making more comments than men. This may reflect that females are beginning to take on more “leadership positions,” but they are still struggling to find the courage to strive for the top.

Throughout their essay, Karen, Heidi and Brad work not only to recount what they saw and heard from their peers; they continually evaluate the situations they observed and the statistics they compiled. In the section of the essay on classroom participation and conversation, they offer this reflection:

Can we draw any conclusions from this data? Perhaps it reflects the transition women are trying to make.... On the one extreme they want to be recognized as equal individuals in society, and do so by participating and showing a good, healthy interest in classroom activities.... At the other extreme, women don’t want to take on more responsibility than men. It appears that females still want to be “protected” and are afraid to assume an equal position with their male counterparts.

At many points, they strive to connect the actions of college-age men and women in the classroom to other cultural situations where similar behavior patterns are evident. For example, they note that their cohorts tend to sit in single-gender groupings during classes, and they connect this phenomenon to their educational pasts: “... The fact that men and women sat according to sex may be linked to kindergarten and grade school experiences. In these institutions males and females were usually grouped according to sex.” Even more intriguing is their effort to explain the varying levels of assertiveness that their peers exhibited in class:
Men’s and women’s behavior in university classrooms may also have roots in the fact that throughout early schooling there have always been sports designed predominantly for men, and others for women. For example, football, which is a sport supposedly designed for men, requires an individual who is aggressive, tough, and strong, which are characteristics thought to be possessed by men, resulting in a male-dominated sport. On the other hand, synchronized swimming, a sport dominated by women, requires grace and finesse, which are thought to be female traits, resulting in a female dominated sport. This separation and others like it may create a natural barrier that is hard to overcome.

In their final analysis, this trio concluded that the study “only goes to show that [gender] roles are not assumed consciously and [only] in the classroom, but are subconscious elements learned through socialization from our ancestors and from the pressures of gender stratification.” Because they grasped so firmly the connections between stories and arguments, they produced a sensitive and cogent assessment of gender issues as they were played out in the classrooms they visited.

Project Three

The third project for the semester reiterates the lessons of the second paper. The students must again assert a thesis and support an argument; primary research is again required. The organization of persuasive writing is often difficult for first-year students to master; such students also need as much practice as possible in formulating effective thesis statements, constructing "topic sentences" and supplying evidence for all arguable propositions. Once again, the instructor can draw upon folklore's understanding of the narrative process in order to underscore the principles of argumentation.
The third project in the popular culture syllabus requires each student to do a thorough evaluation of a popular culture genre, fad, or trend that is of special interest to her. She might study the lyrics and music of her favorite band's oeuvre in order to discern the themes and concerns of the group's work (and the group's fans) as a whole; she might look at a particular film genre that has enjoyed recent popularity (i.e. horror movies whose victims—and heroes—are hip teenagers) in order to determine what the audience's current fears and desires could include; or she might look at an array of books by a best-selling author in order to account for the writer's appeal (for example, she might consider what is consistent from one John Grisham novel to the next and decide that people read his books in droves because they inevitably center on an ordinary individual who takes on a corrupt institution and wins). The task here is similar to that of the advertising project: the writer immerses herself in all the related "texts" that she can locate, and any patterns she observes in the material are defined, then accounted for. A phenomenon is described, and a theory is formulated as to its origins or its effects; its implications are explored.

In the gender issues syllabus, the third paper draws on the work done for the completion of the second paper. The prompt for the project states:

This paper will stem from your group efforts. Each of you will evaluate some aspect of the work you did on the collaborative process. For example, your critique might offer a consideration of the collaborative process (one of its unique challenges, benefits, or difficulties, say), an assessment of the paper produced by your group, or an assessment of a "good"/"bad" way to conduct fieldwork.
In this essay, as in the previous one, each student must construct an argument mainly on the basis of first-hand knowledge. Stories about the student's experiences as a researcher and as a collaborator inform her discussion; once again, she must generalize from her own experiences and observations, supporting her assessments with anecdotes from her work on Project 2.

Each student in the gender issues course is required to file two sets of fieldnotes while the work for Project Two is underway. One set of fieldnotes might be seen as the property of the student's group; these notes concern the behavior of the group's subjects and serve as the basis for the team's collectively composed essay. At the same time that she is amassing data for her group, however, each student is asked to keep a "Collaboration Journal" in which she is to describe and reflect upon her individual efforts toward the execution of her group's project.

Each student is directed to explain in the "Collaboration Journal" what she does in order to prepare for any interviews she conducts, for example, and what she expects before going to observe people's interactions in a particular situation. Likewise, she is expected to comment on what she has heard and seen once her interviews and observations have taken place. She can begin to explore the significance of anything that stood out to her while she was collecting her data; she might discuss any difficulties she had gaining the kinds of information she hoped to obtain or any unanticipated discoveries that she made while in the research setting.

Each student is also instructed to record in the "Collaboration Journal" descriptions of the negotiations that take place among the members of her writing
group, so that she has a record of how decisions are made, how tasks are parcelled out, how conflicts arise and are resolved, how agreements are reached, etc. This "diary" on the collaboration process is to be kept from the time that the group first meets to the time that the final draft of the paper is submitted to the teacher. Its last entry is to offer each student's evaluation of her group's final version of its essay. In effect, then, each group member is working on an autoethnography as she participates in her team's research project.

The third project of popular culture assignment sequence is akin to the second in that the students are being asked 1) to collect a number of "texts" that belong to the same genre, 2) to determine what the texts share, either overtly or implicitly, and 3) to account for any patterns or trends that they discern in their material; like its predecessor, this paper is an exercise in analyzing, demonstrating, and theorizing. Again, too, the students are working with narrative on a number of different levels. Many members of the class choose to study narrative genres—film, television, popular fiction, comic books, songs lyrics, etc. But even those who opt to explore current fads often assemble a collection of narratives, since they usually conduct ethnographic interviews with people who have followed the trends in which they are interested: someone who chooses to make "body art" the subject of her research project, for example, would ask her peers to recount their experiences with being tattooed or having their tongues pierced. Thus, they are once more seeing how people develop and express their opinions and their values via the storytelling process.
The gender issues course also features a third assignment that functions in much the same way that second assignment does. Project Three, like Project Two, requires students to argue a position; again, they are generalizing from their own experiences and must support their interpretations of those experiences by describing what they themselves have done and seen. In order to explain why they endorse a certain approach to collaborative writing or pose a particular solution to a specific problem that is endemic to fieldwork, they must depict situations that unfolded as they worked in their groups or interacted with their consultants while Project Two was underway.

The third project in both the popular culture syllabus and the gender issues syllabus provides the instructor with a chance to emphasize the idea that the argumentative essay in essence tells the story of a writer's arriving at her ideas on her subject. It also gives the teacher the opportunity to reiterate the notion that description is an analytical process: it can once more be explained that the persuasive writer selects her evidence to validate the debatable propositions she asserts in her paper. This project gives the students further experience with choosing details and using language that makes their "readings" of their material clear; it shows them that an argumentative paper traces the growth of a writer's investigation into a topic—it tells the tale of her conducting her research on her subject.
Sample Papers: Project Three

The ways in which the third project deals with the above ideas becomes especially obvious in the papers for the gender issues course. Interestingly, some students chose to maintain the focus on gender, even though this was the one assignment for the course that allowed them to "drop" that subject. One young woman named Bernadette argued that gender stereotypes must be set aside if a group of males and females is to work together successfully. In one of the more engaging paragraphs of her paper, she notes that she had been assigned to a "team" of three men and one woman (herself) then describes what she had anticipated going into Project Two:

There were many expectations going through my mind as I [began] working with this group. Either I expected [the guys] to treat me unequally because I was a girl, or I thought they would just pile all the work on me because of the fact that I was the only girl in the group. Many people feel that the girl can become the backbone of the group by keeping it together because she's considered the person who has her head on straight when it comes down to putting things together or formulating solid information. On the other hand, the male is considered to be the [kind of] person who takes charge in getting information [and then going on to] the next task to be accomplished.

The difficulties that might have arisen from a reliance on such assumptions were avoided by her group, Bernadette asserts, because she and her peers "didn't put any pressure" on anyone to behave in any certain way. "Men and women never see through the same eyes, and they always seem to have different views on life," she remarks. But this seeming problem can be a plus for a group of collaborators, she contends: when males and females are working together, "a man can get a woman's
perspective, and the woman can get a man's perspective”; one learns that “each sex
is capable of exploring each other's mind.” The key to a harmonious exploration of
one another's viewpoints is permitting everyone to suggest methods for the job at
hand, Bernadette explains: “All of us volunteered to work in the areas that we were
strong in and didn't argue about the set-up for the paper. If we didn't think one
[person’s] approach was going to work out very well, we took another [person’s]
approach and came to an agreement on whether or not the last result was going to
help our paper.” Ultimately, this procedure kept the group’s essay from “being
biased towards either sex,” she noted, and in the minds of the group’s members it
also “[took] away from the stereotypes that mislead people [into] thinking that the
opposite sex is hard to get along with.”

More typical was the work of Steve, the basic writer who earlier in the
quarter described his efforts to protect his older sisters when he was the eight-year-
old “man of the house.” Steve wrote a paper extolling the virtues of the
collaborative process and calling for a particular means of distributing the tasks that
fall to a “team” of writers. His paper was representative of those by students who
deemed their experiences with Paper Two satisfactory. In his introduction, he
states:

... Group projects are a good way to learn because they force you to
rely on other people, and this can help you later in life. The way it
helps is by teaching you how to work with people you know and
people you don't know. It also shows you how to make your time
together more productive.
Also typical were the body paragraphs in which Steve demonstrated the value of distributing the collaborative project's workload. In one passage, he wrote:

... Our group project was a success because our group worked well together. The key to our success was that no one got stuck with everything. We all had different angles of the project to work on. For example, my “angle” of the [research] was the interview sheet. I made up the questions, showed [them] to the other members of the group, got their opinions, and revised [the questions]. I then had the final copy of the interview sheet. This is the way everyone did his or her work for gathering data. This method made it possible for everyone to be involved in the project. And that's good because it provided a melting pot of ideas for the paper. It also gave each of us a chance to voice our opinions on [every aspect of] our topic.

In subsequent paragraphs of this essay, Steve demonstrates how the process by which his “team” generated research tools was also an effective when group members met to tabulate their data, devise a thesis, and draft their essay.

The third essays written by Bernadette and Steve nicely illustrate the how the gender issues students used episodes from their recent pasts as support for their assessments of “fieldworking” or collaborating. This activity set them up to write about gender politics more broadly in their final project of the semester. In that last paper, they would write from a more “objective” point of view, in the third person, using hypothetical or generalized examples to bolster their claims. Paper Three’s reliance on a series of brief personal narratives allowed them to practice citing examples and showed them how to situate illustrations in essays that operate deductively, seeking to convince an audience of a declaration’s validity.
Project Four

The fourth and final project for the semester is an argumentative paper that requires secondary research. It is the most “objective” paper and thereby is the least like the personal experience essay with which the two syllabi begin. This is where students most work with the idea that a persuasive piece of writing can indirectly tell a story.

The final paper of the term in the popular culture course is either a revision or an extension of the third paper: the student can write a revised and expanded version of her third essay in which she makes use of secondary source material, or she can write an essay that serves as a “companion piece” to her third essay. If she chooses the latter option, she must approach the subject of Project Three from a new angle and must include secondary research in the discussion. For instance, the student quoted in Chapter 1 of this dissertation chose in Project Three to examine recent portrayals of psychologists on television and in film. For Project 4, she took the "companion piece" option: she moved on to an analysis of call-in radio shows like that of Dr. Laura Schlesinger. This student again immersed herself in primary "texts." listening to many hours of Dr. Laura's program. She supplemented her own assessments of this "psychotainment" with those of a practicing psychiatrist (whom she interviewed) and several writers who, in Psychology Today and The New York Times, had questioned the advisability of dispensing therapy over the airwaves. Had this student instead chosen to expand Project Three in her work on Project
Four, she would have enhanced her interpretations of sitcoms like Frasier with material from published media criticism.

**Sample Papers: Project Four**

For other examples of research papers completed by students in the popular culture course, see Appendix C. There, Aaron takes the “companion pieces” approach to Papers 3 and 4; his original research project uncovers the formula followed in the feature articles that fill the pages of Guitar Player magazine month after month, while his secondary research paper analyzes the responses of readers to the magazine’s articles. Brittney and Angelique opted to write original research projects to which they eventually added secondary source material. Brittney thoroughly scoured Amazon.com’s web site to report on the burgeoning world of e-commerce; after describing what she found, she added a history of Amazon.com and collated critics’ assessments of the site’s attributes and drawbacks, using information from magazine and newspaper articles. Angelique listened carefully and repeatedly to all the CDs recorded by one of her favorite musicians, Tori Amos, to articulate the ethos and philosophies the singer projects in her work. Angelique then worked critics’ remarks and Amos’ own commentary on her music to the discussion. The most complete version of each of these women’s papers appears in the appendix.

All three of these popular culture research papers received “Honorable Mentions” in outstanding first-year writing competitions at Belmont University, and
I think these essays were so well-received because their writers are so lucid in their investigations of their subjects. It is clear that these students understood the idea that they were tacitly telling the stories of their own experiences with their material, and the results are shed light on three interesting popular culture phenomena.

Like the fourth paper in the popular culture syllabus, the fourth project in the gender issues course is a revision of an earlier piece of writing. In this class, the student is called upon to argue a position pertaining to a subject dealt with in one of her "Reader Responses." As I explained earlier in this chapter, each "Reader Response" is linked to the topic of a professionally written essay; it is a short essay of only two double-spaced pages. At the end of the semester, everyone must return to the subject of one mini-paper and investigate it further. The longer, more fully developed and more polished paper on that subject must cite not only the article to which the student reacted initially but material from other sources as well. (For example, after reading David Thomas' essay "The Mind of Man," in The Presence of Others, a student might look for books and other articles which contest or concur with the claim that "there are great social benefits to be had from recognizing that boys may need specially tailored treatment to at least as great an extent as their sisters" (341); the writer would then choose a side in the debate and attempt to convince her readers that her position is the sounder of the two.)

The popular culture assignment sequence culminates in a paper that requires the students to cite outside sources, as does the gender issues assignment sequence. Thus, in the last major project of each syllabus, the students are most obviously
entering into a dialogue with other thinkers. To help them grasp the value and requirements of such writing, the instructor can again draw on folklore's theories concerning the personal narrative. Especially relevant at this point is the belief that in "performing" for an audience a person not only articulates but formulates her own values, opinions, and attitudes.

Typically, the student working on researched persuasion papers is encouraged to look for books, articles, etc. in which credible writers express views that either corroborate or counter the views that she wants to argue in her essay. The instructor in the narrative-centered writing course can demonstrate the need for and importance of such interchange by again referencing the storytelling process.

At the outset of the semester, while the students are working on their first, most explicitly narrative essay, the instructor will have talked with the class about the ways that people share stories about their experiences in the oral tradition. Considering the role that interaction with an audience plays in the shaping of an oral storyteller's tale can be employed to help the composition teacher explain the importance of audience awareness and peer responding to effective writing. Also, throughout the semester, the students have been guided toward the revelation that comparing their own "stories" with those of other writers can lead one to a deeper understanding of her own opinions and those of her fellow discussants on the subjects at hand: a recognition of this idea is the goal of the "Reader Responses" that are to be completed throughout the semester, when each new project is launched. These facts can be reiterated as work on the last paper of the term begins.
The teacher can at this juncture amplify the discussion of how one's listeners shape the tales she tells. After reviewing what generally happens when someone shares the story of an experience with a group of her peers, the instructor can make the case for the writer's supposing such an audience for the argument she is constructing in her researched "position paper." Evoking hypothetical listeners and engaging in imaginary dialogues with them, the teacher can explain, should enable the students to formulate their claims and determine what they must describe and analyze to support their points of view; it should also help them to anticipate and address the opposing arguments of those who would argue or interpret differently and guide them in their efforts to make effective language choices and exploit appropriate rhetorical strategies. Considering others' expressions of their views, the instructor can remind them, forces them to put into words what they believe and question why they feel as they do; it also prompts them to draw up the kinds of evidence that will substantiate their assertions.

When the kinds of illustrations that persuasive writing demands are the focus of class discussion, I can examine narrative in yet another way. Until this point in the semester, the classes' argumentative assignments have derived directly from the students' own course-related experiences and, therefore, the examples that they have used to defend their positions have often taken the form of anecdotes from their recent pasts. Now, as the end of term approaches and the students are primed to do some of their best work of the semester, I ask them to write without so much
reference to themselves—after all, in so many of their future classes, their professors will ask that they present their ideas more "objectively."

Upon requiring the students to write less "self-consciously," I must explain what should replace the sorts of the firsthand accounts that have bolstered the students' assessments in their previous efforts at argumentation (that is, in Projects Two and Three). At this point, I am situated to demonstrate that the illustrative scenarios and hypothetical situations which help a writer explain and justify her views are narratives, too—narratives that are in some way tied to events in the life of the author. These "stories" are either personal anecdotes in which the "I" is suppressed (replaced by a third-person pronoun), or they are imaginative sketches informed by knowledge the writer has obtained on her own or via other sources—who in their work are themselves drawing on various types of personal experience. As Peter Elbow noted in his talk at the 1999 CCCC, "The Personal Is More Complicated Than It Looks," a writer might take up a topic that has personal significance for her, but she might address that topic in "nonpersonal language."

To illuminate the notion that the persuasive essay embodies a series of "implied narratives," the teacher can herself create for the students a hypothetical situation. Even the most scientific of writers could be said to tell a story, the instructor might begin. But the author of a study will not likely publish her findings by chatting with her readers, the instructor can continue: it is hard to imagine a study in the New England Journal of Medicine beginning with the statements, "We decided to gather together four hundred men, aged 35 to 65, who are considered at
risk for heart disease. The first time we met with them, we hooked them up to EKG machines and drew their blood in order to look for factors A, B, and C. Then we looked at the results of the tests and saw these consistencies from subject to subject: X, Y, Z. The patterns we saw prompted us to conclude that males in the age range we studied will probably have conditions 1, 2, and 3; therefore, they should adhere to the following practices—a, b, c. Nonetheless, the teacher can conclude, the paper publishing the researcher's findings and recommendations suggest the story outlined above. This exercise can make the complex process of "nonpersonal" argumentation more readily accessible and comprehensible to beginning writers.

**Final Exam**

It is extremely important to have students review their own writing experiences not only as the course begins, but also as it ends. If they don't tell themselves the stories of their English 101 experiences, they don't necessarily realize what they have learned about writing (and/or themselves as writers) before entering college and after taking the first-year writing course. I therefore ask them during the final exam period to describe and analyze a portion of what they have done over the course of the semester. (I also ask them to set goals for the writing they will do in the following semester, to underscore the fact that they will continually be working to strengthen their communication skills as they move through the university.)
Conclusion

My goal in describing my popular culture course and my gender issues course to illustrate how folkloristics' view of narrative might inform an approach to the teaching of argumentative writing. And in the process of examining my class syllabi, I have tried to indicate how composition's view of argument might illuminate narrative for folklorists. Composition can only be enriched by an inquiry into what it shares with folkloristics—and vice versa; folkloristics can only be enhanced by an investigation into what it shares with composition. Likewise, each of these fields can benefit from seeing how it differs from the other in its comprehension of narration and persuasion.
In the opening lines of their textbook *Everything's an Argument*, Andrea Lunsford and John Ruszkiewicz contend:

An argument can be any text—whether written, spoken, or visual—that expresses a point of view. When you write an argument, you try to influence the opinions of readers—or of yourself. Sometimes arguments can be aggressive, composed deliberately to change what readers believe, think, or do. At other times your goals may be more subtle, and your writing may be designed to convince yourself or others that specific facts are reliable or that certain views should be considered or at least tolerated. (3)

“In fact,” they continue, “some theorists claim that *every* text is an argument, designed to influence readers” (4). I concur with Ruszkiewicz and Lunsford—and with the theorists to whom they refer here—although I would modify their idea to say that every text contains an argument. As well, I would maintain what I see as a corollary position: that every text conveys an implied narrative.
Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz discuss at length the more obvious forms of argumentation—"pieces that make a claim and present evidence to support it" (4). But they also illustrate, quite engagingly, that many things which seem not to be arguments are, in fact, designed to prove a point and/or move an audience to action. A poem that observes a set of circumstances might "indirectly critique" that situation (4); humorous commentary on a familiar human foible might "cause readers to become aware . . . of the way things are and how they might be different" (4). A photograph of a politician might work to "show the candidate in the best possible light" (232). An advertisement that merely pictures a person using a product might be engineered to create certain "needs" in the heart and mind of the potential consumer (233-236).

The same claims can be made for narratives: many things that seem not to be narratives can, in fact, tell a story. A poem that straightforwardly states a viewpoint, without delineating any specific characters or scenes, nonetheless might prompt us to conceive of a particular speaker and the particular kinds of experiences that have led her to adopt the beliefs that she asserts. Such a poem could be said to comprise an implied story. A woman's joking remark about her husband's aggressive driving habits prompts the listener to envision her acquaintances in specific situations and hear precisely the kinds of conversations that take place whenever the man is behind the wheel of his automobile, his frustrated wife by his side. From the carefully staged photograph of a politician, the viewer extrapolates a story, determining how (and why) the candidate is likely to have interacted with her potential constituents.
during the campaign stop. So, too, does the reader of an advertisement extrapolate a story—who are the people in the scene? What are their relationships with one another? How have the goods on display in the ad contributed to the feelings that the models express? Here, too, there is an implied or imagined story.

Even the more obvious forms of argumentation can have at their foundation a narrative element. Arguments that aim to inform, convince, explore, and/or persuade can easily contain anecdotes from the writer's own experiences or the experiences of those with whom she is acquainted. But an argument that does not employ stories of specific incidents might still be said to operate from a narrative frame of reference. If a writer deals in hypothetical situations, for instance, she is using what she has done or felt or observed. The author of argumentative writing is virtually always drawing on what she has seen or heard for herself, somewhere—in the pages of another writer's scholarly article, through the microscope in her laboratory, as she has taken ethnographic field notes, at a rally where impassioned speeches have been given—even if she writes about such experiences in "objective," "impersonal" language, following the conventions of scientific or philosophical discourse.

The work of the folklorists cited throughout this document amply illustrate that narratives—and especially personal experience narratives—seek to fulfill the same purposes that arguments do: narratives, too, express a point of view and try to influence the opinions of readers (or listeners). Personal narratives, like arguments, can be composed deliberately for the purpose of changing an audience's thinking or
behavior—they are often employed to drive a point home or to persuade someone that a certain course of action is possible, or ill-advised, or in everyone's best interest. Similarly, personal stories are often offered to make the case that certain views should be (or should not be) examined and/or tolerated—a narrator might share an experience to show the consequences (or advisability) of dismissing the view in question; she might tell a tale to indicate why tolerance (or intolerance) of that view is desirable. It is also important to note that stories do not always accomplish what they set out to do; they can fail to persuade—and this is yet another way in which they are comparable to arguments. In addition, narratives, like arguments, can operate with great subtlety. A story that appears merely to describe a set of circumstances can serve to convince the teller and others that particular facts are reliable. One frequently recounts an experience in order to formulate her conception of an event that has occurred at some point in her past; with the telling, she is determining what has happened at given point in time and posing the idea that what took place was noteworthy—important in some way. As Amy Shuman asserts in her book on Storytelling Rights, the process of making an experience into an event is a narrative process (54-76).

If, indeed, every argument tells a story, and every story builds an argument, those of us who teach beginning college writing would do well to think more critically about storytelling and call more attention to it than we already do. Many—if not most—of us do include some form of personal experience writing in our course curricula. If the most popular textbooks in our field are any indication, a
large percentage of us tend to begin our classes by having our students write about something significant that has happened to them, but we then go on to structure the rest of the term around the principles of argumentation, allowing narrative to fall nearly out of sight.

While we are focused on narration, we have our students concentrate on telling their stories graphically, but we don’t stress for them the fact that as they select the details that will make their narratives vivid they are working out interpretations of the events they portray—we deal with this implicitly, if we deal with it at all. We do ask our students to evaluate the situations they describe—to talk about the meanings of their experiences—but we don’t connect this sort of analysis with the kind that goes on in a paper that overtly argues a position or seek to persuade. We might allow for expressive, or personal, writing throughout the term in journals or other “informal” assignments, but by and large, we lay it aside early on, to take up the supposedly more important work of writing deductively—writing to establish the validity of an debatable proposition.

While we are teaching our students to venture and support a thesis, we make mention of personal narration only as it might serve the effort to prove a point. We don’t explicitly note that a narrative is in and of itself a form of argumentative discourse. Moreover, whenever we do allow narration to reemerge, it is for a brief appearance only, and we hasten to point out that stories from personal experience are “not enough” to justify taking a particular stance on an issue. Anecdotal evidence can play a minor role in successful persuasion, we caution, but there is
better, more reliable evidence we can muster, we say, turning to statistics, quantitative data, case studies, etc.—as if such material is removed from the experiences of those who record and collate or compile it.

Folkloristics demonstrates why we ought to rethink the way in which we position personal narrative in the first-year writing course. With its emphasis on the constitutive nature of the personal experience stories and on the ways in which listeners and tellers collaborate in the crafting of such stories, folkloristics' personal narrative scholarship provides writing teachers with a perspective on discourse that might begin to 1) dissolve some of composition theory's conflicts and 2) make way for even more effective composition pedagogy.

When folklorists argue that the narrator of a personal experience story defines an event as she tells her tale to her audience, determining its parameters and its significance as she speaks, and as she reads her listener's responses to what she says, they are in a way reconciling some of the main issues that create tension between composition's expressivists and social constructionists. Folkloristics' conception of the narrative process stems from the notion that language shapes the individual—and at the same time allows for the notion that knowledge and community are built collaboratively as people interact with one another using language. If we look at personal narrative in the way that folklorists do, we understand that the self is not a stable, coherent entity but one that is continually changing, constantly being remade as the individual voices, and thus gives form to, her experiences. We also understand that the self is remade as the individual
follows the stories others tell of their experiences. And we acknowledge that as we impose shape upon our experiences by telling stories about them, we are working within established conventions that are traditional to our discourse communities. In my opinion, these views make it possible for an instructor to take expressivist approaches and cultural studies approaches to the teaching of writing within the same classroom.

In that classroom, narrative is a fundamental part of every task that is assigned to the students. The writers who develop their communication skills in that setting still move from papers that are overtly narrative to those that implicitly refer to stories from the authors' experiences, but narration is not shunted to the sidelines once an initial "warm-up" essay is completed. Instead, narrative assignments can serve to launch each of the term's major projects, even those that eventually result in argumentative or persuasive papers that strictly follow the conventions of critical writing. And perhaps more importantly, overarching connections between narration and argumentation will continuously be drawn, so that students will come to see the two modes of discourse as reciprocal or complementary processes.

For Further Research

Now that I have begun to consider the ways that folkloristics composition studies complement (and differ from) one another, I can see some directions in which scholars in both fields might take their research. One promising area for further inquiry would involve a close interrogation of the stories university students
write for what they reveal about the "master narratives" by which we live in this culture. In their introductory composition courses, first-year college writers generally produce at least one essay that primarily takes an explicitly narrative form. And if we consider the numerous argumentative or persuasive essays these students also produce to be "implied narratives," as I do in this dissertation, we have at our disposal a potentially vast source of data on the means by which people organize and make sense of their experiences. A careful reading of these papers could greatly enhance our understanding of the cultural narratives that dominate our thinking and comprise our worldview. We could then call our students' attention to the assumptions implicit in such narratives and work with those students to broach explanations for values, attitudes, and beliefs we uncover. We might also work to challenge the dominant narratives and/or subvert them whenever we encounter what we would consider disturbing or dangerous notions.

It would also be fascinating to interrogate college writers' essays as "implied narratives" about their experiences of the university. The context in which a story is told plays a large part in the shaping of the narrative, as does the audience for whom the story is performed; thus, the essays students compose are encoded with information about their perceptions about what we say and do with them in our classes; they could provide us with access to the tales they tell themselves about their academic experiences, their sense of what the academic community values and expects of them, and their understanding of what the educated, literate person is like. As we uncover the stories suggested in and by our students' "thesis-and-
support" writing, we can refine our understanding of what we need to say, do, and require of them in our mission to help them become keenly critical readers, writers, and thinkers. Again, it would be useful to call the students' attention to the stories they tacitly tell in their argumentative essays: analyzing the "education narratives" implied their persuasion papers could heighten students' awareness of how and what they are learning and giving them further practice in critical reading as well.
APPENDIX A

ENGLISH 101:
"THE POLITICS OF POPULAR CULTURE"
English 101: Beginning Composition
<3 credit hours>
Semester/Year

Professor Cynthia Cox
Office: xxxxx
Phone: xxx-xxxx
Office Hours: xxxx

Course Objectives:
The purpose of English 101C is to teach the writing of personal, expository, and persuasive/argumentative essays. You will write for different audiences, purposes, and points of view, to heighten your awareness and knowledge of language. You will also learn and use various rhetorical skills. You will enhance your critical skills as you consider information derived from a variety of sources; develop an awareness of your own and others' ethics and values; examine how technology contributes to the gathering and communication of information; evaluate how to identify and address an intended audience; learn proper documentation styles; and develop problem-solving skills. Thus, you will identify and apply skills that contribute to effective thinking, reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Course Description:
English 101C is a beginning-level course designed to strengthen your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Over the next sixteen weeks, you will work both on your own and in collaboration with some of your classmates to complete a series of related essay assignments. You will also record your responses to your reading assignments and your class activities. We will review the rules of English grammar and mechanics as necessary—but our emphasis in our work will be on the processes of critical thinking, reading, and writing. Your thoughtful and enthusiastic participation in class discussions and group activities is essential and will contribute toward your final grade for the course.

Class Policies:
1. Attendance: The workshop format of this course demands that you attend class daily and that you hand in your papers on time. If you miss 1-5 classes, you will find your participation grade lowered at the end of the semester. If you miss a sixth class meeting, for any reason, you will fail the course—no exceptions. (This is in accordance with the Department of Literature and Language's attendance policy.) Since this course is structured on a tight schedule and many class periods are devoted to important activities, you must also be on time each day—I will record one absence for each two times that you are late.
2. **Late Assignments:** In fairness to all class members, no late papers will be accepted at any time.

3. **Assignment Formats:** You are free to complete by hand any "prewriting" exercises that you are assigned as you begin each of your major papers. Your "Reader Responses," your rough drafts and your final drafts of your essays must be typed and stored on a diskette. (If you do not wish to complete your assignments on a PC, you should enroll in a "non-computer" section of English 101.) You should follow the manuscript format I give you in class.

***Note: Prewriting materials and rough drafts will be collected with each of your final drafts. Rough drafts are required for each project--each missing draft lowers your final grade on the assignment by one letter. If you fail to attend a "Responding Session," or if you attend a "Responding Session" without a complete rough draft, you will be counted "absent"; your rough draft will be considered "missing" and will not be taken late.

4. **Materials:** The three required textbooks for this course are *The Concise Guide to Writing*, 2nd edition; *The Everyday Writer*; and *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture*, 3rd edition. You also need to buy a 3.5" computer diskette and a two-pocket folder in which to keep "hard copies" of your written work for the semester. (This folder, containing all your written work for English 101C, will be collected at the end of the term; you may retrieve it from me at the beginning of the following semester.)

5. **Grading:** Your final grade will be determined according to the following breakdown:

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<th>Project 1:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Project 2:</td>
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<td>Project 3:</td>
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<td>Project 4:</td>
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<td>Final Exam:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reader Responses:</td>
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<td>Participation:</td>
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***Note: If you do not complete all major assignments, you will fail the course.
Writing Assignments

Essay Topics

Diagnostic Essay
Write a short essay in which you describe a time when you were affected by a TV show or a movie—a time when something you saw on television or in film caused you to look at your own life differently. What happened on the show or in the movie? What did it make you see in a new way? What changes did it inspire you to attempt? How successful were these attempts at change?

Project 1
For your first project this semester, I would like you to describe and evaluate, in an essay of 4-5 pages, a situation in which you were affected by something in the media or popular culture. Work to portray significant scenes and people vividly, then go on to interpret the event for your readers, explaining just what you learned or just how you changed as result of the experience.

Project 2
For your second project this semester, I would like you to analyze, in a short essay of five pages or so, several print advertisements for the same—or similar—products. How do advertisers tend to market these products? What selling tactics do they use in the ads? What assumptions do they seem to be making about the consumers who buy such products?

Projects 3 & 4
In your work on your last two projects for the semester, you will write two papers on some aspect of popular culture that is of particular interest to you. We will talk in class about various aspects of television as you begin work on these projects, but you are free to write about some other aspect of "pop culture" if you'd like—film, music, fashion, etc. Your work on Project 3 will involve original, or primary, research; your work on Project 4 will require you to do secondary, or library, research. Project 4 will concern the same subject that you pursue in Project 3; in fact, it will be a revision and/or expansion of Project 3. Your grades on these projects will be determined both by the quality of your research and the quality of the final drafts of your papers.

Final Exam
For your final essay, I want you to describe something that you've discovered/realized about your writing or about yourself as a writer during the course of this quarter. You might consider changes you've observed in your writing process or in some aspect of your attitude towards writing. The discovery you examine doesn't have to be "earth-shattering"; rather, you should analyze something that truly surprised you about writing—the process or the product.
Your essay should contain a clear thesis and supporting details. You will need to cite specific examples from your experiences during the term (and perhaps even include some description of writing experiences you have had prior to this term) in order to illustrate/explain/account for any assessments you make.

Reader Response Topics
Your "Reader Responses" should contain your reactions to the articles you read in Signs of Life in the USA. Each of your responses should be approximately 2 double-spaced pages in length; you should answer the questions posed in the "prompts" below as fully and as thoughtfully as you can, in as much detail as possible. Your writing in your responses need not be as polished as that in your more extensive essays; write clearly as you can, and try to organize your thoughts as you respond, but concentrate your efforts on grappling with the issues raised in the material you've read. Problems to avoid: responses that are too short; responses that are carelessly composed; responses that are extremely general; responses that fail to address the assigned topics.

Reader Response 1
A. Reflect on the role writing has played in your education and personal life. Maybe you can recall a time—writing for yourself or for a school assignment—when writing enabled you to think in a way that surprised you. What kind of writing were you doing, and what did you discover? Or think of an occasion when you experienced great success with a school assignment. How did this come about, and what did you achieve? Or perhaps you once urgently needed to communicate with someone—in anger, love, hope, jealousy, disagreement—writing seemed the best way to do it. Describe this occasion. What brought it about? What did you say? What response did you get? Write a brief essay, giving specific examples of how writing has affected your life.

B. Describe how you normally write. How much time do you spend thinking and making notes before writing a draft? What kinds of things do you do to help with invention—read what others have written, talk with friends, do freewriting, cluster your ideas, etc.? How many drafts do you usually write? Do you share your drafts with friends or teachers to get their critical comments? What do you do when you revise a draft—change the wording, rearrange parts, cut or add whole sections? Do you proofread for clarity, grammar, and spelling? If so, at what point in the process?

Reader Response 2
Think of a toy you played with as a child, and write a semiotic interpretation of it, using Emily Prager's essay "Our Barbies, Ourselves" as a model. Explore what the toy meant to you when you were young, and consider the differences between your childhood response to the toy and your current assessment of it.
Reader Response 3
After reading Ted Polhemus' analysis of "Street Style," analyze the popularity of one specific fashion trend of the 1990s. Exactly what does this "look" include? What messages do its wearers send by this choice of clothing? How do they want others to "read" them?

Reader Response 4
After considering Susan Willis' observations of Disney World, write an essay in which you examine a tourist attraction that you have visited. Describe this place in as much detail as possible. Then go on to analyze its appeal as fully as you can. Just how does it attract its viewers? What specific features seem to draw visitors in? Why might it be satisfying to those who file through its exhibits?

Reader Response 5
Analyze semiotically your own apartment or a room in your house, using Joan Kron's essay "The Semiotics of Home Decor" as a critical framework. How do your furnishings and possessions act as signs of your identity? What specifically do they reveal about you?

Reader Response 6
Once you have examined Sandra Loh's study of Doris Day and Pamela Wilson's study of Dolly Parton, consider the persona of a current actor or musician. What values does this performer appear to stand for? Support your analysis of him/her by describing specific roles he/she has played or songs he/she sings. You might also consider how he/she acts in "real life"—when he/she is appearing in public, being interviewed on "Entertainment Tonight," etc.

Reader Response 7
Analyze one of the fictional characters currently seen in television and/or print advertisements. With what product is this character identified? How is this character portrayed in the ads? What qualities or traits do the advertisers want you to see in this character? Why?

Reader Response 8
Once you've read Jack Solomon's "Masters of Desire," obtain the current issue of a popular magazine that you enjoy reading. Do its advertisements tend to have an elitist or a populist appeal? Support your answer by analyzing three or four specific ads. Finally, consider the relationship you see between the appeal you identify and the magazine's target readership. Why might the magazine contain the kinds of ads it does?
Reader Response 9
Think about a couple television shows that attempt to portray "smart women." Using as your starting point the arguments of Susan Douglas in "Signs of Intelligent Life on TV," discuss whether the shows really adopt a feminist or antifeminist stance in portraying their female characters.

Reader Response 10
Describe a character from current popular culture who, like each of the "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles," functions as a hero. For what values does this character stand? How does this character convey these values? Support your claims by assessing specific situations in which we can see this "hero" function.

Reader Response 11
Write a one-page summary of the New York Times article "Japanese Family Values: I Choose You, Pikachu!" OR of the Salon magazine article "For the Love of the Game Show." Include three (and only three) short quotations in your summary, documenting them properly in MLA style. Then write a one-page response to the arguments raised in the article you summarized. Put a "Work Cited" entry at the end of your paper, using MLA style.

Reader Response 12
Write a one-page summary of the New York Times Magazine article "The Oprah Effect." Include three (and only three) short quotations in your summary, documenting them properly in MLA style. Then write a one-page response to the arguments raised in the article you summarized. Put a "Work Cited" entry at the end of your paper, using MLA style.

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Class Schedule

Week One:
Day 1 Course Description & Class Policies

Day 2 Diagnostic Essay & Reader Response 1 Due
"Introduction" (Concise Guide to Writing 1-16)
"The Classroom and the Wider Culture..." (Signs of Life in the USA 531-540)
"Everything You Always Knew About American Culture But Nobody Asked]" (Signs of Life in the USA 1-18)
Day 3

*Introduction to Project 1*
"Remembering Events" ([Concise Guide to Writing](#) 17-47)
"Looking for Work" (Handout)

**Reader Response 2 Due**
"Toys" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 96-98)
"Our Barbies, Ourselves" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 375-377)

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**Week Two:**

**Day 4**

**Reader Response 3 Due**
"Street Style" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 56-65)
"Hard Bodies" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 66-71)

**Day 5**

**Reader Response 4 Due**
"Disney World: Public Use/Private State" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 83-95)

**Day 6**

**Topic for Project 1 Due**
"Strategies for All-Purpose Invention" ([Concise Guide to Writing](#) 205-212)

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**Week Three:**

**Day 7**

**Reader Response 5 Due**
"The Semiotics of Home Decor" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 72-82)
"The Signs of Shopping" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 38-45)

**Day 8**

**Reader Responses 6 Due**
"The Return of Doris Day" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 287-294)
"Mountains of Contradictions: Gender, Class, and Region in the Star Image of Dolly Parton" ([Signs of Life in the USA](#) 240-255)

**Day 9**

**Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 1 Due**
"Frequently Asked Questions: The Twenty Most Common Errors" ([Everyday Writer](#) 9-24)

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**Week Four:**

**Day 10**

**Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 1 Due**

**Day 11**

Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

**Day 12**

Group Activity: Toward Lean, Direct Writing

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Week Five:
Day 13  Introduction to Project 2
"Brought to You B(u)y: The Signs of Advertising" (Signs of Life in the USA 101-111)
"Arguing a Position--Readings" (Concise Guide to Writing 120-137)
"Strategies for Cueing Readers" (Concise Guide to Writing 189-204)

Day 14  Final Draft of Project 1 + All "Process Materials" Due

Day 15  Reader Response 7 Due
"Advertising Characters: The Pantheon of Consumerism" (Signs of Life in the USA 381-390)
"Say It Ain't Cool, Joe" (Signs of Life in the USA 378-380)

Week Six:
Day 16  Reader Response 8 Due
"The Parable of the Democracy of Goods" (Signs of Life in the USA 112-119)
"Masters of Desire: The Culture of American Advertising" (Signs of Life in the USA 120-134)

Day 17  "Arguing a Position--Guide to Writing" (Concise Guide to Writing 137-151)

Day 18  Topic for Project 2 Due

Week Seven:
Day 19  Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 2 Due
"Sentence Style" (Everyday Writer 61-83)

Day 20  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 21  Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 2 Due

Week Eight:
Day 22  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 23  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 24  Fall Break—No Classes
Week Nine:
Day 25  *Introduction to Projects 3 & 4*

**Reader Response 9 Due**
"Signs of Intelligent Life on TV" *(Signs of Life in the USA 200-204)*
"Men on TV: Dumb as Posts and Proud of It" *(Handout)*

Day 26  **Final Draft of Project 2 + All “Process Materials” Due**

**Reader Response 10 Due**
"The Reflection on the Screen: Television’s Image of Children" *(Handout)*
"From Common Dullness to Fleeting Wonder: The Manipulation of Cultural Meaning in the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle Saga" *(Handout)*
"What Makes Superman So Darned American?" *(Signs of Life in the USA 344-352)*

Day 27  Group Activity: Brainstorming for the Research Project

Week Ten:
Day 28  **Topic for Project 3 Due**
Methodology: Original Research

Day 29  Writing Workshop

Day 30  Writing Workshop

Week Eleven:
Day 31  **Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 3 Due**

Day 32  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 33  **Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 3 Due**

Week Twelve:
Day 34  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 35  "Strategies for Doing Research in the Library & On the Internet" *(Concise Guide to Writing 228-254)*
"Doing Research" *(Everyday Writer 259-288)*

Day 36  Library Tour
**Week Thirteen:**

**Day 37**  
**Final Draft of Project 3 + All "Process Materials" Due**  
"Strategies for Using and Acknowledging Sources" (Concise Guide to Writing 255-274)  
"Documenting Sources, MLA Style" (Everyday Writer 289-330)

**Day 38**  
**Reader Response 11 Due**  
"Japanese Family Values: I Choose You, Pikachu!" (Handout)  
"For the Love of the Game Show" (Handout)

**Day 39**  
**Reader Response 12 Due**  
"The Oprah Effect"

**Week Fourteen:**

**Day 40**  
**Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 4 Due**

**Day 41**  
**Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences**

**Day 42**  
**Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 4 Due**

**Week Fifteen:**

**Day 43**  
**Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences**

**Day 44**  
**Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences**

**Day 45**  
**Final Draft of Project 4 + All "Process Materials" Due**

**Final Exam Session:**  
**Day/Month/Year**
APPENDIX B

ENGLISH 101:
"THE POLITICS OF GENDER"
Course Objectives:
The purpose of English 101C is to teach the writing of personal, expository, and persuasive/argumentative essays. You will write for different audiences, purposes, and points of view, to heighten your awareness and knowledge of language. You will also learn and use various rhetorical skills. You will enhance your critical skills as you consider information derived from a variety of sources; develop an awareness of your own and others' ethics and values; examine how technology contributes to the gathering and communication of information; evaluate how to identify and address an intended audience; learn proper documentation styles; and develop problem-solving skills. Thus, you will identify and apply skills that contribute to effective thinking, reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

Course Description:
English 101C is a beginning-level course designed to strengthen your critical thinking, reading, and writing skills. Over the next sixteen weeks, you will work both on your own and in collaboration with some of your classmates to complete a series of related essay assignments. You will also record your responses to your reading assignments and your class activities. We will review the rules of English grammar and mechanics as necessary—but our emphasis in our work will be on the processes of critical thinking, reading, and writing. Your thoughtful and enthusiastic participation in class discussions and group activities is essential and will contribute toward your final grade for the course.

Class Policies:
1. Attendance: The workshop format of this course demands that you attend class daily and that you hand in your papers on time. If you miss 1-5 classes, you will find your participation grade lowered at the end of the semester. If you miss a sixth class meeting, for any reason, you will fail the course—no exceptions. (This is in accordance with the Department of Literature and Language's attendance policy.) Since this course is structured on a tight schedule and many class periods are devoted to important activities, you must also be on time each day—I will record one absence for each two times that you are late.

2. Late Assignments: In fairness to all class members, no late papers will be accepted at any time.
3. **Assignment Formats:** You are free to complete by hand any "prewriting" exercises that you are assigned as you begin each of your major papers. Your "Reader Responses," your rough drafts and your final drafts of your essays must be typed and stored on a diskette. (If you do not wish to complete your assignments on a PC, you should enroll in a "non-computer" section of English 101.) You should follow the manuscript format I give you in class.

***Note:*** Prewriting materials and rough drafts will be collected with each of your final drafts. Rough drafts are **required** for each project--each missing draft lowers your final grade on the assignment by one letter. If you fail to attend a "Responding Session," or if you attend a "Responding Session" without a complete rough draft, you will be counted "absent"; your rough draft will be considered "missing" and will not be taken late.

4. **Materials:** The three required textbooks for this course are *The Concise Guide to Writing*, 2nd edition; *The Everyday Writer*; and *Male/Female Roles* (Laura Egendorf, ed.). You also need to buy a 3.5" computer diskette and a two-pocket folder in which to keep "hard copies" of your written work for the semester. (This folder, containing all your written work for English 101C, will be collected at the end of the term; you may retrieve it from me at the beginning of the Spring semester.)

5. **Grading:** Your final grade will be determined according to the following breakdown:

- Project 1: 15%
- Project 2: 15%
- Project 3: 20%
- Project 4: 20%
- Final Exam: 5%
- Reader Responses: 15%
- Participation: 10%

***Note:*** If you do not complete all major assignments, you will fail the course.
Writing Assignments

Essay Topics

Diagnostic Essay
Anatomy aside, what is the essential/most important difference between men and women? Why do you think so? Assert a claim about this, and support/defend that claim from relevant personal experience and/or observation.

Project 1
For your first essay this semester, I would like you to articulate an opinion on some aspect of relations between men and women, and I would like you to account for your view by supplying your readers with first-hand evidence—that is, evidence from personal experience. Below are a couple of possible approaches that you might take to the subject, although you might focus your discussion in another way, if you so desire.

- Have you ever had an encounter with sexism? What happened? Describe the incident in the kind of detail that will make your readers fully understand the situation, then analyze what you describe—what did the experience suggest to you about the attitudes men have toward women, or vice versa? Are these attitudes as they should be? Why or why not?

- What happens when a man takes on a role that is traditionally played by a woman? When a woman takes on a “male” role? Describe one occasion on which you defied tradition and played a part usually reserved for members of the opposite sex. What did you learn from this experience? How did it affect your view of yourself? How did it affect your perceptions of men and women in general? What does your experience say about the ways in which we define ourselves by society’s expectations? Again, you will need to describe and analyze the experience in the kind of detail that will make your readers fully understand the situation and your assessments of it.

Projects 2 & 3
With your first assignment, I asked you to draw on personal experience in order to offer some sort of comment on the views men and women typically have of one another and/or the “gender roles” that tradition has established for men and women over the years. In your second paper, I want to continue investigating—and challenging—the ways in which assumptions made on the basis of gender influence how we behave and how we see/make judgements about one another. This time you will be drawing on material that you gather through various kinds of observation: along with two or three classmates, you will be doing research among the men and
women around you on campus, studying their behaviors in a specific situation, looking for interesting patterns/differences/similarities. (This is what scholarly types in such fields as anthropology and folklore refer to as "fieldwork.") Once you, along with the other members of your group, have devised at least two methods of collecting information, and once you have gathered plenty of data, the members of your group will collaborate on an informative essay in which you report your findings and offer some sort of (tentative) interpretation of them.

Paper 3 will also stem from your group efforts. In that essay, each of you will evaluate some aspect of your work on the collaborative project. For example, your critique might offer a consideration of the collaborative process (one of its unique challenges, benefits or difficulties, say) an assessment of the paper produced by your group, or an assessment of a good/bad way to conduct fieldwork.

Process Materials for Papers 2 & 3 will include:

- Brainstorming Notes produced in early class sessions devoted to formulating your “Research Questions” and exploring options and methods for gathering data.
- A “Prospectus” outlining the group’s “Research Questions” & a “Plan of Action” describing how and where data will be collected.
- Brainstorming Notes/Freewritings produced in later class sessions when the writing of the essay gets underway.
- At least two different research instruments of the group’s devising. (These might include sets of interview questions, questionnaires, and/or observation forms, for example.)
- “Fieldnotes”: Each person’s record of his/her observations and/or interviews.
- “Collaboration Journal”: Each person’s record of 1) what happens during group meetings and 2) what happens as each group member is going about his/her individual tasks & assignments—basically, your comments on a) any work that you do on your own and b) any interaction that takes place between/among people working on the same project. This can take the form of a daily journal; it should be detailed and candid—only I will see it.
- Rough Drafts (at least two) of the collaborative essay.
- Rough Drafts (at least two) of the critical-evaluative essay.

Project 4

In this essay, I would like you to develop one of your “Reader-Response” journal entries (or a couple of related responses) into a “Position Paper” so that you might 1) offer further comment on our different expectations of men & women and 2) continue to explore ways in which we might break down traditional gender barriers.
and bring about positive change in our attitudes about roles men & women (should) play at home, in the workplace, etc.

**Final Exam**

For your final essay, I want you to describe something that you've discovered/realized about your writing or about yourself as a writer during the course of this quarter. You might consider changes you've observed in your writing process or in some aspect of your attitude towards writing. The discovery you examine doesn't have to be "earth-shattering"; rather, you should analyze something that truly surprised you about writing—the process or the product.

Your essay should contain a clear thesis and supporting details. You will need to cite specific examples from your experiences during the term (and perhaps even include some description of writing experiences you have had prior to this term) in order to illustrate/explain/account for any assessments you make.

**Reader Response Topics**

Your "Reader Responses" should contain your reactions to the articles in your Kinko's packet. Each of your responses should be approximately 2 double-spaced pages in length; you should answer the questions posed in the "prompts" below as fully and as thoughtfully as you can, in as much detail as possible. Your writing in your responses need not be as polished as that in your more extensive essays; write clearly as you can, and try to organize your thoughts as you respond, but concentrate your efforts on grappling with the issues raised in the material you've read.

Problems to avoid: responses that are too short; responses that are carelessly composed; responses that are extremely general; responses that fail to address the assigned topics.

**Reader Response 1**

A. Reflect on the role writing has played in your education and personal life. Maybe you can recall a time—writing for yourself or for a school assignment—when writing enabled you to think in a way that surprised you. What kind of writing were you doing, and what did you discover? Or think of an occasion when you experienced great success with a school assignment. How did this come about, and what did you achieve? Or perhaps you once urgently needed to communicate with someone—in anger, love, hope, jealousy, disagreement—and writing seemed the best way to do it. Describe this occasion. What brought it about? What did you say? What response did you get? Write a brief essay, giving specific examples of how writing has affected your life.

B. Describe how you normally write. How much time do you spend thinking and making notes before writing a draft? What kinds of things do you do to help with invention—read what others have written, talk with friends, do freewriting, cluster your ideas, etc.? How many drafts do you usually write? Do you share your drafts
with friends or teachers to get their critical comments? What do you do when you revise a draft—change the wording, rearrange parts, cut or add whole sections? Do you proofread for clarity, grammar, and spelling? If so, at what point in the process?

**Reader Response 2**
After reading about Barbies, GI Joes, and board games, think of a toy you played with as a child. Describe and analyze your experiences with the toy. Explore what the toy meant to you when you were young, and consider the differences between your childhood response to the toy and your current assessment of it. Also consider what the toy might’ve “taught” you about traditional gender roles.

**Reader Response 3**
The authors in the first chapter of *Male/Female Roles* discuss the influences of biology and culture in determining differences between men and women. Which influences, if any, do you think are the strongest? Explain your answer, drawing from your own experiences and observations.

**Reader Response 4**
In “A Wasteland of One’s Own,” Francine Prose contends, “As entertainment executives see it, ‘women’s fare’ is only a step above ‘young adult.’ Though no one will admit it, the prevailing wisdom is that women are stupid and narcissistic, desiring only mindless entertainment.” Visit some of the websites Prose mentions in her article (ivillage.com, oxygen.com, etc.), then describe and analyze what you find there. Is there evidence to support Prose’s claim? Evidence that contradicts it?

**Reader Response 5**
Read Deborah Tannen’s essay “There Is No Unmarked Woman.” Then spend a day surveying the extent to which the males and females in your classes are “marked” or “unmarked,” in Tannen’s terms. Pay attention to such “signs” as clothing and hairstyle. Do the males tend to have unmarked styles? Do the women send messages by their styles? Discuss the results of your observations, and reflect on the validity of Tannen’s assertions.

**Reader Response 6**
Obtain a copy of one of the men’s magazines Diane Barthel mentions in her essay “A Gentleman and a Consumer.” Study the magazine’s advertising. Do the ads corroborate Barthel’s claim that men today are allowed to demonstrate both their “masculine” and “feminine” sides? Describe and analyze several specific ads in support of your answer.
Reader Response 7
Spend a little time watching television to determine whether Anita Gates is correct. Are men on TV “dumb as posts”? Do they seem proud of their stupidity? Support your answers with examples from two or three different programs. Try, too, to account for the trends you see. Why might men be shown in the ways that you note?

Reader Response 8
Many people believe that men and women struggle so much in their relationships with one another because males and females tend to communicate in very different ways—this is the premise of the well-known book Men Are From Mars, Women Are From Venus, for example. One popular theory is that women seek to build rapport with others when they converse, while men see conversation as an opportunity to compete with others. Spend a day listening to as many conversations as you can, and see if you can detect any patterns along gender lines. Jot down interesting snippets of the talk you hear as you go about your day, then analyze them.

Reader Response 9
After reading about some of the difficulties young women face at school (in Peggy Orenstein’s SchoolGirls and Margaret Finders’ Just Girls), envision a classroom that might address the special needs of female students. What would this classroom look like? How would people behave in this setting (teachers and pupils)? What kinds of activities would be encouraged there? What kinds of behavior would be discouraged there?

Reader Response 10
After reading about some of the difficulties young men face at school (in David Thomas’ “The Mind of Man” and Christina Hoff Sommers’ “The War Against Boys”), envision a classroom that might address the special needs of male students. What would this classroom look like? How would people behave in this setting (teachers and pupils)? What kinds of activities would be encouraged there? What kinds of behavior would be discouraged there?

Reader Response 11
Write a one-page summary of the article "Bad Sistas." Include three (and only three) short quotations in your summary, documenting them properly in MLA style. Then write a one-page response to the arguments raised in the article you summarized. Put a "Work Cited" entry at the end of your paper, using MLA style.

Reader Response 12
Write a one-page summary of the article “Power at Play: Sports and Gender Relations.” Include three (and only three) short quotations in your summary, documenting them properly in MLA style. Then write a one-page response to the
arguments raised in the article you summarized. Put a "Work Cited" entry at the end of your paper, using MLA style.

Class Schedule

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<th>Week One:</th>
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<tr>
<td>Day 1</td>
<td>Course Description &amp; Class Policies</td>
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</table>
| Day 2     | **Diagnostic Essay & Reader Response 1 Due**  
           | "Introduction" ([Concise Guide to Writing](1-161))  
           | “Why Consider Opposing Viewpoints?”  
           | ([Male/Female Roles](9-14)) |
| Day 3     | **Reader Response 2 Due**  
           | “How Are Gender Roles Established?” ([Male/Female Roles](17-30))  
           | “Boys-R-Us: Board Games and the Socialization of Young Adolescent Girls” ([Signs of Life in the USA](3rd ed.))  
           | “Barbie, GI Joe, and Play in the 1960s” ([Signs of Life in the USA](3rd ed.)) |

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<th>Week Two:</th>
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| Day 4     | **Reader Response 3 Due**  
           | “How Are Gender Roles Established?” ([Male/Female Roles](31-54)) |
| Day 5     | **Reader Response 4 Due**  
           | “Have Women’s Roles Changed For the Better?”  
           | ([Male/Female Roles](58-80))  
           | “Signs of Intelligent Life on TV” ([Signs of Life in the USA](3rd ed.))  
           | “A Wasteland of One’s Own” ([The New York Times Magazine](1984)) |
| Day 6     | **Reader Response 5 Due**  
           | “Have Women’s Roles Changed For the Better?”  
           | ([Male/Female Roles](81-99))  
           | “There Is No Unmarked Woman” ([Signs of Life in the USA](3rd ed.)) |
Week Three:
Day 7  Topic for Project 1 Due
"Strategies for All-Purpose Invention" (Concise Guide to Writing 205-212)

Day 8  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 9  Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 1 Due
"Frequently Asked Questions: The Twenty Most Common Errors" (Everyday Writer 9-24)

Week Four:
Day 10  Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 1 Due

Day 11  Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Day 12  Group Activity: Toward Lean, Direct Writing

Week Five:
Day 13  Introduction to Project 2
"Arguing a Position—Readings" (Concise Guide to Writing 120-137)
"Strategies for Cueing Readers" (Concise Guide to Writing 189-204)

Day 14  Final Draft of Project 1 + All "Process Materials" Due
Methodology: Doing Field Research

Day 15  Methodology: Collaborating with Your Peers

Week Six:
Day 16  Reader Response 6 Due
"Have Men’s Roles Changed For the Better?” (Male/Female Roles 103-123)
"A Gentleman and a Consumer” (from Signs of Life in the USA, 3rd ed.)

Day 17  Prospectus for Project 2 Due

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Day 18  **Reader Response 7 Due**  
"Have Men’s Roles Changed For the Better?” (Male/Female Roles 124-137)  
“Plotting Paternity: Looking for Dad on the Daytime Soaps”  
(from Signs of Life in the USA, 3rd ed.)  
"Men on TV: Dumb as Posts and Proud of It" (Handout)

**Week Seven:**
Day 19  Group Meetings

Day 20  **Reader Response 8 Due**  
“What Will Improve Male/Female Relationships?” (Male/Female Roles 141-166)

Day 21  Group Meetings

**Week Eight:**
Day 22  "Arguing a Position—Guide to Writing" (Concise Guide to Writing 137-151)

Day 23  **Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 2 Due**

Day 24  **Fall Break—No Classes**

**Week Nine:**
Day 25  Writing Workshop/Group Meetings

Day 26  **Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 2 Due**

Day 27  Writing Workshop/Group Meetings

**Week Ten:**  
Day 28  **Introduction to Project 3**

Day 29  **Reader Response 9 Due**  
Excerpt from Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap  
Excerpt from Just Girls: Hidden Literacies and Life in Junior High

Day 30  **Reader Response 10 Due**  
“The Mind of Man” (from The Presence of Others, 3rd ed.)  
“The War Against Boys” (Atlantic Monthly)
Week Eleven:
Day 31 Final Draft of Project 2 + All “Process Materials” Due
Day 32 Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences
Day 33 Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Week Twelve:
Day 34 Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 3 Due
Day 35 Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences
Day 36 Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 3 Due

Week Thirteen:
Day 37 Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences
Day 38 Introduction to Project 4
  "Strategies for Doing Research in the Library & On the Internet"  
  (Concise Guide to Writing 228-254)
  "Doing Research" (Everyday Writer 259-288)
Day 39 Reader Response 11 Due
  "Strategies for Using and Acknowledging Sources" (Concise Guide to Writing 255-274)
  "Documenting Sources, MLA Style" (Everyday Writer 289-330)
  “Bad Sistas” (from Signs of Life in the USA, 3rd ed.)

Week Fourteen:
Day 40 Final Draft of Project 3 + All “Process Materials” Due
Day 41 Reader Response 12 Due
  “Power at Play: Sports and Gender Relations” (from Signs of Life in the USA, 3rd ed.)
Day 42 Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences

Week Fifteen:
Day 43 Responding Session: Draft 1 of Project 4 Due
Day 44 Responding Session: Draft 2 of Project 4 Due
Day 45 Writing Workshop/In-Class Conferences
Final Exam Session:
Day/Month/Year

The final draft of Project 4 (plus all "Process Materials") is due at the beginning of the final exam period.
Project 3: Cover Stories

All magazines and periodical publications feature a specific topic in each issue known as the cover story. While a variety of topics are introduced and discussed within the content of the magazine the cover story remains the foremost important subject that the magazine deals with. The cover story usually contains an in depth discussion on the topic it relates to, as well as significant amounts of research and information about the topic. The cover stories for Guitar Player magazine, a monthly periodical written especially for guitarists, fall directly into these parameters for a featured topic. All the cover stories fit into three main categories: articles about products, articles about certain types of music and playing styles, and articles about certain musicians or groups of musicians. While each month's cover story contains information about a different topic, all the cover stories parallel each other in certain ways. The article formats, article introductions, side articles within the cover stories, pictures, and the placement of the cover stories within the magazine remain consistent from issue to issue.

One of the main categories of cover stories is articles about different products, gear, or recording techniques. While these stories are similar in style to
the other types of articles, their subject matter classifies them into a separate category. The February 1998 issue entitled “50 Ways To Record Killer Guitar Tracks” presents an example of this type of cover story. The article contains fifty different sub-categories, each describing a different method to record guitar tracks in the studio. The recording techniques sections give a detailed explanation of all fifty tips. The first tip given is titled “Dead On,” and it tells the reader about a recording technique in which “the mic is pointed directly at the speaker cone from a distance of one or two inches.” This information gives the average reader inside information to the professional recording industry.

The cover story of the October 1999 issue, “The Best Budget Acoustic-Electrics,” also fits into the products, gear, and recording techniques category. This article individually rates twelve different acoustic electric guitars which all cost fewer than one thousand dollars. All the guitars were evaluated for their playability, workmanship, and sound and are rated using a pick scale, with one-half a pick being the lowest and five picks being the highest. Each section of the article also contained comments about each guitar. The comments sections help give the reader a better mental picture of the guitar, as well as commentary on how the instrument plays. The article about the Alvarez AJ60C describes the guitar saying, “The satin-finished neck feels nice, and the smallish frets and medium-height action make for buzz-free fingerings in all registers (Thompson 78). Readers shopping for a high quality, affordable, acoustic-electric guitar benefit from the thorough testing, and professional advice given by guitar player magazine.
Another general category of cover stories is articles about playing styles or certain techniques. This type of feature article not only contains information about the style or technique itself, but also offers bios about the musicians who are known for playing the featured type of music. The article will also generally provide certain scales or exercises to aide the reader in learning more about a certain style or technique of music. For example, the March 1999 issue, entitled “Slide Power,” includes seventeen different exercises to help develop the technique of slide guitar. The article also contains explanations of the different exercises and informs the reader of the purpose of each exercise. Guitar Player magazine also includes stories, quotes and information from people like Duane Allman, a notorious slide guitarist. The author describes the purpose of the second exercise as learning how to “drop Allman’s Statesboro Blues phrase down two octaves to take advantage of open strings” (Ellis 77). Hints on what the pros use to develop their skills motivate readers to practice and take their playing to the next level.

The July 1999 issue of Guitar Player magazine highlights a certain style of player; therefore this cover story also fits into the category of articles about certain playing styles or techniques. The article features masters of the Fender Stratocaster and is appropriately titled “Strat Masters.” This article contains twenty-three guitarists who "define the Strat sound," claim the staff writers who co-wrote this story (55). The story includes bios and pertinent information about each player who holds the responsibility of helping to define the sound of the Strat. The article features players such as Eric Clapton, Jimi Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan. The
story talks about each player’s different Stratocasters and why they prefer certain models. The section on Eric Johnson proclaims, “Although he favors ample necks, Johnson found a ’65 Strat with a rosewood fretboard that he liked” (Strat-O-Masters 61). These opinions are very important because ordinary guitarists hold great stock in personal opinions from guitar legends. The January 1999 issue also features players of a certain style of music. The article’s title, “Be a Blues God,” tells it all. Featured in the story are guitarists renowned for their ability to play the blues. The article not only includes information about the players but also the exercises and techniques they use to obtain the skills they possess. “Be a Blues God” provides motivation and insight comparable to the other cover stories in its category.

The third general category of cover stories belongs to the articles about specific musicians or groups of musicians. These articles generally fall into two different subcategories. The stories feature new musicians who are either currently popular or older musicians with long-term fame. The stories also tend to relate to the musician(s) current projects and discuss things such as newly released albums or big upcoming concerts. Furthermore, the articles discuss certain unique techniques or instruments the artists use to make their signature sounds.

The May 1999 issue features information from Tom Petty and Mike Campbell about “Making the New Heartbreakers’ Album.” After a brief introduction, the article reveals information about Tom Petty as a rhythm guitarist and songwriter, then moves on to discuss the types of equipment, guitars, amplifiers and effects, used by Petty and Campbell to record the album. The story
also compares the album and lyrical content to past albums and other Heartbreaker’s material. Tom Petty discusses the most exciting thing for him on his new album, “I like the songs. Also, this record has a real live element it doesn’t sound over edited” (Thompson 86). This laid-back, down-to-earth style of interview remains similar for all the interviews in the magazine. Personalized interviews give the reader a chance to feel like a part of the artist’s career.

The November 1999 issue, about pop/rock female artist Meredith Brooks, is comparable to the cover story about Tom Petty. Meredith’s story goes in depth in examining and discussing her new album “Deconstruction.” Brooks comments on her musical evolution from her debut album, “Blurring the Edges.” After being asked her thoughts and reasons behind making a less alternative and more rock album, Meredith said, “What I’m saying with this album is, you can play traditional rock and still move forward” (Molenda 85). The article also presents information on the innovative "warped riffs, weird noises, and strange textures" that Brooks achieves on her new album by using an array of different guitars, effects and playing techniques. The December 1999 Guitar Player magazine features Ben Harper, "a twenty-first century guitar hero." The article highlights Harper’s creative folk-blues style of playing, and discusses his roots as a musician. The story also includes information about the instruments he uses to accomplish his distinct tone. The information about current projects, personal music styles, and ways of achieving certain types of sounds and tones, all help to categorize the cover stories in this particular class, as well as provide personal facts to entertain the reader.
The format of the information provided in the cover stories relating to a specific musician or a group of musicians is very similar. After the introduction all the articles in this category present information in the style of an interview. The cover story about Meredith Brooks begins with a short “bio,” followed by a question and answer session with Meredith. In this section the interviewer poses questions on everything from Meredith’s last album to the production process of her new album. After each question are Meredith’s replies and then the next question. The cover story on Ben Harper and Tom Petty are organized in the exact same manner. The interview method of presenting information about the musicians in the cover stories remains a commonplace theme throughout the issues containing stories about a specific musician or group of musicians.

All cover stories in Guitar Player magazine begin with an introduction section, before the actual article begins. The article about the best budget acoustic electric guitars begins with a short section discussing acoustic electric guitars in general and then gives a brief synopsis of the relevance of critiquing budget guitars. The introduction also serves to obtain the reader’s interest. “The Best Budget Acoustic-Electrics” article begins with by stating, “Acoustic Electric Guitars priced under $1,000 are one of the hottest sectors of the musical-instrument market (Thompson 77). The July 1999 issue about masters of the Stratocaster begins with a quick overview of the Strat itself. This introduction includes 1955, the year of the first Stratocaster, followed by a bit about Leo Fender, one of the original founders of
Fender Guitars. Each cover story regardless of its topic begins with an introduction section.

Within the majority of the cover stories lie other small articles relating to the main article. On the second page of the article about Ben Harper there is a small section at the top right hand of the page entitled “Ben Harper on MP3 and “Evil Record Labels.” While this section of the article does not directly relate to the rest of the article, it gives the reader a personalized opinion from Ben Harper himself. Ben says, “You’ve got to see both sides of it— the good and the bad” in response to whether MP3’s have a positive or negative impact on the industry (Ellis 81). On the fifth page of the cover story on how to become a blues god is a small box with two paragraphs entitled “Tritone Twins and The Flat Five Substitution.” This side article provides extra information on the topic of playing the blues. These small articles with in the main article help characterize the cover stories. By adding sections of information related to the main topic of the article the reader gains more knowledge and insight into the featured subject.

All of the feature articles in Guitar Player magazine also include pictures relevant to the topic of the article. The issue entitled “50 Ways to Record Killer Guitar Tracks” contains pictures that display the recording methods described. After the section of the article entitled “Boom and Snap” is a picture of a studio room with and amplifier and the two microphones set up as described in the article. Adding pictures, like the one displaying the “Boom and Snap” technique, give the reader a visual display of the information provided by the text. The articles
featuring different artists generally have a number of pictures of the artist throughout the article. The issue about Tom Petty and Mike Campbell includes six pictures of the two musicians. One picture has the two musicians in a wild pose together on stage during their younger days, while another picture has the two musicians sitting together playing in the studio. The wide array of pictures helps the writer display Tom and Mike’s longstanding popularity and success. The article about masters of the Stratocaster also has a variety of pictures of the featured guitarists. In general the pictures in the articles help to solidify the information in the story. Placing pictures throughout the story gives the reader an illustration of what is being discussed and makes clear anything that might have seemed confusing.

Although not exactly the same, the placement of the cover stories inside each issue corresponds to one another. The articles are usually more or less in the middle of the magazine. The bulk of the articles begin between pages fifty and eighty. The magazine tends to run around one hundred and fifty pages, which place the cover stories in the middle of the magazine.

All magazines contain cover stories based on one main topic. After analyzing the cover stories in Guitar Player magazine the reader begins to notice certain parameters that all the stories fall into, as well as characteristics shared by all the stories. The three main categories of topics relate to common themes that interest guitar players world wide. The similarities within the cover stories also help provide the information in an easy to understand way. The similarities in cover
stories and writing styles in *Guitar Player* make it an informative, easy-to-read magazine.

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Guitar Player magazine, a monthly publication, provides a wide spectrum of information for guitarists of all ages, styles, and abilities. The magazine covers a variety of topics and works to highlight information, which is beneficial for the readers. While the majority of the guitarists who read the magazine applaud its content, others often disagree with some of the material the journalists write about. Some readers enjoy interviews about certain musicians; however, others may loathe the same article. Examining the reader's responses allows for an in-depth understanding of what certain musicians find advantageous. Certain responses also provide examples of good and bad ways to voice an opinion.

Although a number of things, such as a solid body of information, helpful hints, and insightful interviews combine together to comprise a superior story, the opinions from the readers of Guitar Player magazine prove that no story can please everyone, and everyone perceives the material in a different way.

Each issue contains a page of reader's opinions entitled “Feedback,” and the letters printed there are about the stories in previous issues. Each “Feedback” page consists of between five and ten reader opinions. A mixture of positive and
negative opinions is included in each issue in order to display different readers' criteria for rating articles.

Even though one reader may greatly benefit from a certain article, another reader may feel that the same article wastes space, and holds no real value for serious guitarists. Brad Hardisty, from Hamilton, Missouri, writes in response to the article on technology, "Technology is a blessing to all musicians" (17). He goes on to describe the opportunities that technology, especially the Internet, have created for guitarists. His recent purchase of new recording gear and his development of a home studio allow him to record albums in his own home. In his letter Brad not only approves of the article on technology but also tells of his personal benefits from the increase in technology in music. However, other readers disagree and feel that a magazine solely for guitarists should leave out technological information and stick to stories about playing guitar. In the April Feedback columns Laury Katz wrote, "Lately, I think the magazine is becoming a catalog for recording studio equipment" (17). Mr. Katz describes how his infatuation with the magazine has begun to wane, as the stories seem to include less technique and song information, and more non-guitar related information. Each reader is entitled to his or her own opinion, but in a world that relies heavily on technology to lessen the workload and perform difficult jobs, musicians must acknowledge the significance of new tools.

Even articles written about well-known musicians with long-term fame, which appeal to the majority of people, still receive criticism from certain readers. The May 1999 issue featured Tom Petty and Mike Campbell, who have obtained
long-term success in the music industry. The article discussed their newly released album as well as some of Tom and Mike's older projects. In response to this article, Frank Czaja, a displeased reader, writes, "I just received my May 1999 issue, and to my dismay, found another cover story on an aging rocker— Tom Petty" (Czaja 17). He continues on to talk about Petty's and Mike's receding hairlines and aged faces. Mr. Czaja feels a lack of interest for stories written about those he considers old, overplayed musicians. He also questions Guitar Player magazine's lack of coverage of hot new guitarists such as Tempe and Our Lady Peace. The negative responses to articles often contain little thought or examination. To stop supplying information about the great guitarists who helped shape much of the music we listen to today would do away with a lot of important history. The list of new artists written about in Guitar Player magazine is very long, and in fact an article about Our Lady Peace ran in the August 1995 issue. Often readers read one issue about a topic that does not interest them and they become irate, instead of examining the article and learning something new.

Other readers realized Mr. Czaja's blatant disrespect and stupidity regarding a great musician. Bill Royal refutes Czaja's opinions by saying, "His concern is obviously the artist's hair, and not the talent.... Petty has been creating consistently great music for more than 20 years" (Royal 17). Readers should consider an array of things before they chose to dismiss renowned musicians because of their age.

Negative remarks about the articles in Guitar Player magazine tend to lack evidence to support the writer's criticisms, and instead display fits of emotion, while
positive comments are inclined to explain what reader enjoyed or found interesting about the article. Ryan Bass, from Hollywood, California, writes, "Your January '99 issue totally sucks! I couldn't find enough interesting stuff to read to last my trip to the laundry mat. Screw you all! I won't be renewing my subscription" (17). This pathetic critique typifies the pessimistic opinions in the "Feedback" column. Bass says nothing about why he dislikes the magazine, just that it is boring. Perhaps if he expounded on his disappointment the writers could make an effort to make the magazine more appealing. Negative opinions tend to blast the article with fallacious arguments, instead of providing incisive remarks.

On the other hand, readers with praise for the magazine tend to cite what they like about certain articles, which encourages the writers to keep producing beneficial material. Don Gentry praises the way Guitar Player magazine continually evolves. He says, "Thanks for changing appropriately with the times, while still reminding us of the rich history of guitar" (Gentry 17). In his commentary Gentry sites what he enjoys about the magazine. He feels that Guitar Player continually provides information about hot, new artists and keeps guitarists up-to-date with important changes in today’s music scene. Doug Sherry, another content reader, writes to convey his satisfaction with the article about Les Paul Legends. He declares, "It is about time this no-nonsense instrument—which has come to virtually define the sound and vibe of so much rock and blues—got the attention it so richly deserves" (17). He also approves of the pertinent examples the magazine used to highlight the Les Paul. In Mr. Sherry’s letter he not only praises the article
written, but also defines what about the article pleased him, as well as why it was valuable. An effective letter to the editor backs the writer's opinions with premeditated thoughts and examples.

Michael Molenda, the editor of Guitar Player magazine, writes responses to some of the "Feedbacks" in order to provide the point of view of the staff on certain opinions. He answers questions and rebuts negative opinions when necessary. Philip Jones of Georgia blasts the magazine's creative team claiming that certain faces, such as those of Jimi Hendrix and Eric Clapton, appear on the cover way too often. He concludes his letter by requesting the staff to "forward the remaining issues of [his] subscription to hell" (17). Molenda returns this comment by saying, "We'll respect your request to transfer your subscription to Satan, but just for the record, the last time Hendrix beamed from a full GP cover was August of 1997" (17). He goes on to recount the dates that the other "over-used" guitarists turned up on the cover of Guitar Player magazine. In another instance a reader wrote to express his dissatisfaction with the overly simple song transcription in the January of 1999. He states, "'Blues Tools' in the 'Blues God' issue was the biggest waste of paper ever" (Josh 17). But Michael Molenda declares that the transcriptions were added for people who like to play songs instead of work through lessons. He adds, "If you read Jesse Gress' extremely insightful introductions for each song, you'll gain the perspective of a true scholar who digs deep into the music" (Molenda 17). While most negative criticisms need no rebuttal, Molenda's witty, well-structured
comments successfully recapitulate the magazine’s purpose for covering certain subjects.

As any well-respected editor for a highly acclaimed magazine would, Michael Molenda accepts the responsibility for any errors made by he or his staff. After receiving a letter from a reader questioning a caption under a picture, which had misnamed an amplifier in the picture, Molenda wrote, “You are right! We blew it. We took the info from Carlton’s current gear list and foolishly neglected to double-check the photo. Consider us properly embarrassed” (Molenda 17). Joseph Ruggieri wrote a letter to Guitar Player magazine informing them of a misstated scale length for one of the guitars in their review of acoustic-electric guitars. After researching Joseph’s statement Molenda admits, “We undershot the mark a bit. According to Guild, the scale measures less than 25.5” on the high-E string to almost 25 and 5/8” on the low-E. Molenda’s admissions of error prove that he is willing to accept the blame for any mistakes in the magazine’s content, which effectively increases the magazine’s credibility.

Both positive and negative opinions from readers are beneficial to magazine writers. A pensive examination of the material in the magazine provides insight on areas that need improvement. Unfortunately all the comments in the "Feedback" section do not offer viable, useful opinions. However, the positive critiques in this section of the magazine emphasize the reasons Guitar Player magazine remains the highest selling periodical for guitarists, worldwide. The difference in opinions of the readers goes to show that no magazine can appeal to all of its subscribers.
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Project 4: The World of Virtual Shopping

With all our new technology, it only makes sense that we should be able to do all our shopping from the comfort of our own homes or offices. This shopping, called e-commerce, is booming, and it is only a click away. There are more than 300,000 sites to choose from, when one feels like surfing through the virtual mall. There are sites that specialize in certain products, there are sites that sell used things and even auction them off, and then there are, of course, sites that have a variety of goods. According to a survey done by PC Computing magazine in November 1999, the most visited site on the Internet is Amazon.com, which focuses on selling books, music, videos and DVDs, but has expanded to sell virtually everything one could want. If Amazon does not have the product someone is searching for, they list a number of sites where it can be located. Amazon.com was rated #1 by readers of PC Computing, in overall satisfaction, product selection, price and customer support. Out of all online shopping sites, Amazon was also the site that users were most likely to recommend to others ("PC Magazine Readers" 56).

All the fuss about Seattle based Amazon’s online shopping has been filling the news, magazines and papers at an increasing rate since it first began as an online bookstore in July 1995. Jeff Bezos, a graduate from Texas Christian University,
first started the company after hearing the Internet was growing 2,300 percent per year. Known as “Earth’s Biggest Bookstore,” Barnes & Noble then became their biggest rival with competing advertisements. However, after Amazon improved their slogan to “Books, Music and More,” Bezos commented, “A year from now I don’t think Barnes & Noble will even be able to consider us a rival” (De Jonge 2).

When you first visit the Amazon website’s welcome page, you see a variety of options to choose from and a special sales list. At the top of the page are links to Amazon’s top categories: books, music, DVD/video, toys & games, electronics/software, home improvement, auctions and Z-shops. You can click on any of these options and be linked to a specific category’s homepage. Along the side of the page are links to customer help, a search box, your personal account and your shopping cart (what you place on a list to buy). All the options available are on the first page and easily accessible.

Although Amazon has hugely evolved into a vast collection of products, books still top the sales list. The books homepage has various options to choose from. In direct view are a few new releases that are highly recommended, and then to the side is a list of the top 100 bestsellers, updated hourly. One recent review for a book, Cryptonomicon, states, “Neal Stephenson takes the reader on a cyber fictional joyride—and makes you wonder whether the future is all it’s cracked up to be. Give it to your favorite Sci-fi fan or treat yourself to this great adventure.” The reviews give a good picture of what the book is about and convinces you of good reasons to purchase it. There are thousands of options ranging from audio books to
bargain books to books on numerous subjects; Amazon carries any type of book one could ever want. The search option is the most commonly used tool. You can search by author, title, subject, ISBN number, publisher or date. For example, when “Stephen King” is typed in the author search box, a list of 566 titles show up on screen. The list can then be scrolled through. For each selection a picture of the book shows up next to the title along with the list price, Amazon’s price, the amount of money saved by purchasing through Amazon, the availability (most say “shipped within 24 hours”) and the customer review star chart.

The music section works much like that for the books and is the second most used page in Amazon. The first page also has new releases, best sellers and sale items. Amazon tries to draw your attention to a certain product by recommending it. In a recommendation for the new Beastie Boys CD, Amazon states, “This Beastie Boys double CD is filled with not just the hits, but also loads of fun rarities and a handful of new tracks.” To the left of the page is a list of music types to search through. However, if you are looking for a specific music piece, the search option is the best way to go. Searching options are by artist, title and label. Then you must choose whether to search through CDs, cassettes or vinyl records. The DVD/video page is set up the same and used in the same fashion. However, search is by keyword. For example when “rock” is typed in, 356 options come up, all titles containing the word “rock.” If Tom Cruise is typed into the search box, all 50 movies he has ever appeared in show up on screen.
Toys, electronics and home improvement are all run like the others with the top sellers on the front page, along with categories to search from. The toy page offers games and toys for many different interests along with all age groups. One can find the new Sega Dreamcast or the hard-to-find Pokemon rarities. There is a separate section for video games, which range about 20% cheaper than those bought in a conventional store. In the electronic department is the newest stereo, television, video and computer equipment, including a new Hewlett Packard 430 handheld PC that was shown in the new James Bond movie. Also offered is a gift of the week; various products are offered at a 40% discount. Then in the home improvement department are a variety of household appliances, like vacuum cleaners and bookstands, and tools for any building or renovating project, such as table saws or tool kits.

After searching through the millions of products online and you decide to buy something, it’s as easy as what they call “1-2-3-click.” All you have to do is highlight the item you wish to buy, and then click on the shopping cart icon at the top of the page. What that does is place the item in your personal shopping cart, where you can add or remove items at any time throughout your visit. When you are done filling your shopping cart with all you’d like to buy, you click on the checkout icon. The checkout icon then takes you to the checkout counter—like in a real store. An order form comes up on the screen after being filtered into a secured system, and you fill out an order form which asks for your email address, password (you choose a password so that in future visits you don’t have to retype your
personal information), payment method (credit card, gift certificate, check or money order), shipping address and phone number. The information you submit then shows up on the screen and you are asked to confirm the information. You then have one last chance to cancel the order, but if you are still satisfied you click the order button and all is done. Amazon sends you a confirmation by email of your order and total pricing.

Auctions and Z-shops are the newest additions to Amazon's site. Auctions are for items placed on sale by an individual seller or business. You can browse through the millions of items or search through numerous categories. Once you see an item you would like to have you click the bid button at the top of the screen. For example, say you want to buy a new stereo. The high bid for a 1995 Pioneer CD player is set at $75 so far you type in the maximum value you are willing to pay—say $130. Amazon keeps this information on hand but keeps it secret. Your bidding then starts slightly higher than the set price, and as others bid higher, your price goes up also until it reaches your maximum price, where Amazon then pulls you out of the bidding process. Live auction times are also posted and are available and run much like chat rooms. To sell a personal item, registration is required with a minimum selling value and then the seller just sits back and lets Amazon do the rest.

Z-shops are the newest addition to the Amazon bazaar, with a beginning of 560,000 additional products. Individual merchants pay $9.99 a month to be listed on the site and distribute their own goods. Almost anyone can sell online.
However, Amazon will exclude merchants considered "offensive"—those selling guns, pornography, hate literature and live animals—since Amazon's mission statement promises to "use the Internet to offer products that educate, inform and inspire." Amazon receives a fee when an item is purchased from a Z-shop. For example, anything under $25 has a 5% fee, and anything over $25 has a 2.5% fee. Research on these Z-shops was done by Salon.com, who pointed out, "For the small merchant, Z-shops is a way to get products to a huge buying audience without the costs of developing and marketing a separate Web site" ("Amazon" 2). As Chris Vroom, E-commerce stock analyst puts it, "Consumers win, retailers win and Amazon wins BIG time" (Kaufman 3). Allowing individuals to sell on their website just makes the variety of products increase. Jeff Bezos claims, "We want to have universal selection for customers. We want to have earth's biggest selection." He also realizes that "the only way it's going to happen is by banding together with thousands and tens of thousands and probably even millions of third parties, and partnering with those folks, and that is what's going to happen and, you know, it should be a win-win-win" ("Tech Titans" 8E).

Not only is Amazon linked together with small business owners and individual sellers, but they have negotiated deals with big Internet portals such as Yahoo! and AOL. If you click on any of AOL or Yahoo!'s sites, you will immediately find an ad for Amazon. The deal with AOL cost $17 million for a three-year advertising contract. Now similar deals are being made with other big-
name Internet providers. However, those large companies are realizing the growth expansion and the price has risen to about $50 million (Higham 1).

With all this sudden expansion, Amazon has benefited considerably. More than 12 million shoppers have bought something on its site, up from 10.7 million just three months ago. Shares of stock have climbed 15% within the last four months and Amazon is now considered a brand name. Their site attracts more shoppers than any other on the Web and is basically an undeclared monopoly ("Amazon" 1).

Although all this e-commerce is easy to use and handy, many people are still reluctant to order online solely because they question the security of personal information being passed online. However, security is no question when it comes to Amazon. They use the best software called SSL, which is the #1 encrypting software available. They guarantee, “...Every transaction you make at Amazon will be 100% safe. You pay nothing if unauthorized charges are made to your card as a result of shopping at Amazon.com.” If you are still not convinced of the safety of your personal information over the Internet you can type in the last five digits of a credit card number and call in the rest of the information.

According to a study released by Jupiter Communications, a media research firm in New York, 74% of people who had shopped online said they were satisfied with the experience (Chaplin 3). So what makes online shopping so popular? Not surprisingly, the biggest attraction is convenience. 70% of online shoppers say they do all of their online buying from home ("Online" 124). Since online shopping is
available 24/7, it can work around even the busiest person’s schedule. Other advantages are fewer hassles, saving time, lower prices, no taxes and not having to deal with sales people. There is usually a larger selection at one site than you would find in a single store, so you don’t have to drive or shop around. Many people hate the mall and dealing with store personnel, and virtual shopping is direct shopping with no personal interaction ("Online 124-5"). As one fan of online shopping recently told me, “I think this direct shopping is such a good idea. At college I don’t have a car so I can only go to the mall according to other people’s schedules, which can conflict with mine. Now when I want something I can just get online and order it and get it in the mail before I would ever get around to the mall.”

Pricing is always a factor when a consumer is looking to buy a product. Amazon promises discounts on all products and lower prices than stores. Specifically, they offer 50% off of New York Times bestseller books, 30% off of most CD’s and videos, 20% off of all paperbacks and 30% off of hardbacks. I personally bought a new release CD while browsing the Amazon website and saved $5.00 off of store prices even after shipping charges were added. And the only difference is a seven-day maximum wait to receive the product (and every time you order from Amazon, the delivery time is upgraded).

When consumers are looking to purchase a new item, the reputation of a product is a major determining factor. Amazon realizes that a product review can make or break a sale and therefore offer customer reviews to be published for every product, whether the results are good or bad. As Bob Tedeschi puts it in a recent
article published in the *New York Times*. "Consumers frequently give much more credence to the opinions of 'real people'—friends or peers who buy similar products" (Tedeschi 1). Readers can rate products based on a five-star scale and post comments of their own. Since Amazon doesn’t carry its own inventory but orders from large distributors, they don’t lose anything by printing bad reviews, and customers respect that they are honest. Trust is built, and consumers will continue to shop at Amazon knowing it is a sincere company.

After visiting the many e-shopping sites, you can find anything you wish to buy or even sell off what you thought no one would ever buy. Being at the top of the shopping list, Amazon could bring on a whole new way of life to the new millennium. With shopping only a click away people may quit leaving their houses and everything may become impersonal, but with business booming and customers highly satisfied, this new trend is viewed as the best thing since sliced bread.
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One of the most talented musicians performing today is Tori Amos. Not only does she write and sing her own songs, but she plays piano beautifully and brilliantly. What truly makes her music so powerful, however, are her completely heartfelt lyrics. Throughout her music she pursues two primary themes which are Christianity and men's power over women in society. To relay messages on these subjects, she uses specific influences from her own life.

Christianity is a major theme in almost all of Tori's songs, whether it be what the whole song is centered around or a simply something she mentions. When Tori was growing up, her father was a minister. Obviously, she went to church every time the doors opened for the congregation because of her dad's status. In an interview for the video anthology *Little Earthquakes*, Tori says that being in this environment all the time eventually confused her because she was "taking all the beliefs around [her] and making them [her] own." Adopting so many different people's religious beliefs left her questioning her own convictions, but she was scared to do this because, as a Christian, she thought that she was not supposed to question her philosophies. This was especially true in the house of a preacher. Soon she realized that she had to decide what she believed in on her own, whether it was right or not. In her music it is obvious that she is convinced that one's spirituality is only the business of that person and God. She looks at Christianity as
corrupted by society but sacred to the honest individual. Dr. Amos, her father, recalls in an interview, “The first time I told Tori the Christmas story, she asked me what would have happened if Joseph had emerged from the manger shouting ‘Wow! It’s a girl!”’ (qtd. in Michael II). Even at a young age, Tori was willing to question God and His supposed gender. There are not too many children who would ask this question so openly and honestly. Obviously, she from the beginning believed that a relationship with God is purely a friendship with the Invisible.

One of the songs in which she expresses this opinion comes from her first album, Under the Pink, and is actually titled "God." It mainly focuses on the fact that He is so unpredictable and does not always do what we want Him to do. We often think of God as failing to answer our prayers, and we wonder where he is. She expresses this with straightforward accusations:

God, sometimes you just don't come through...
I gotta find why you always go when the wind blows.
Tell me you're crazy--
Maybe then I'll understand.

In these lines, she is totally letting out her feelings to God. She seems to be frustrated with the fact that God seems to leave her when the going gets tough, and she does not understand why He does this. Thinking that God may be crazy helps her confusion somewhat—He doesn't always seem to help her in her times of need, and if He's crazy it makes sense that He doesn't respond the way she wants Him to. She realizes how hard it is to know God; she seems to feel we can only grasp Him if we give Him human qualities.

Tori does not attempt only to understand God, however; she also struggles to understand herself in relation to God. Specifically, she wonders how He can be so
merciful when she has such a difficult time forgiving herself. In another song called "Precious Things" she says,

These precious things, let them bleed, let them wash away.

These precious things, let them break their hold over me.

I think that this is an extremely powerful song about sin. Tori is wanting so badly to be able to forgive herself like God supposedly forgives her. Growing up in a religion of contrition such as Christianity has made her such a guilty person, and she wants rid of her shame. She wants to be able to go on with her life and forget about the things that she can't take back. She here grapples with a problem many Christians face as they try to establish a personal relationship with God.

In addition to her predicament with forgiveness, Amos expresses a problem with loving herself. Dealing with this idea is a beautiful song by the name of "Winter." The chorus of this song is,

He says when you gonna make up your mind?
When you gonna love you as much as I do?

These lines exhibit a powerful expression of her lack of love for herself. She talks of how God asks her when she is going to decide to love herself like He loves her. Her main idea of this song is that no one is perfect, and we just have to accept ourselves. If the Faultless One can accept us for who we are, then surely we ourselves should be able to do the same.

Aside from struggling with her love for herself, Tori addresses the one situation that leaves us all in confusion. What happens to us after we die? Confronting this unanswered question is a clever song called "Happy Phantom." A part of the chorus is.
The sun is getting dim.

Will we pay for who we've been?

Again, she is obviously talking about the subject of sin. If we have been failures in God's eyes, are we going to pay for it? She wonders this because she says that if it was her choice, she would be a happy phantom who chased nuns in the rain and ran through the streets naked without her mask on. She wonders if we get our choice of what happens or if God truly has the final say-so. Without a doubt, Christianity is a major theme in her music. I think that she has become secure with the fact that she really does not know all the answers about religion and death, but she is comfortable with having God as her most important friend whom she is completely honest with as far as her feelings about Him are concerned.

The most intriguing aspect of her views on religion is her opinion of Jesus and Lucifer. As a child she developed ideas about them both that carried into her adulthood. Her beliefs certainly do differ from the norm. Discussing religion with biographer Mick St. Michael, she says, "I had a really big crush on Jesus. I used to think that I would have been a really good girlfriend for him. I got into big trouble for that" (11). Being a minister's daughter, it is amazing that she looks at him in this way. Even more amazing are her unique thoughts on Satan: "I wanted to marry Lucifer even though I had a crush on Jesus. Lucifer was the brother holding the space for mankind/womankind to act out their fears and hidden secrets, things they won't acknowledge. That's what the shadow is, the side that's been denied, and once you don't deny your shadow anymore then it's not a perversion of that energy source. I don't consider Lucifer an evil force. We can all tap into that free-running current of distorted energy" (Block 46). These are both such powerful thoughts to
have. Although it may seem like Tori has a corrupted faith, it is apparent that her faith is actually extremely strong to be able to openly express these philosophies.

Tori's other main theme in her music is her frustration with men's dominance over women. I think that there are two reasons for this being one of her main themes. One is that women sadly live in a men's world. This is extremely discouraging, in her opinion. The most important reason, though, is that she was brutally raped a few years ago. This made her think a lot about the power men truly have over women on this earth. Talking about this theme in her music, she describes a song she wrote by the name of "Cornflake Girl." She explains that this song, influenced by Alice Walker's novel Possessing the Secret of Joy wherein the mothers of a tribe allow the removal of their daughters' genitalia as a part of a traditional ritual, deals with betrayal amongst women. Talking about the video of this song Tori says, "You know if I'm going to have a boy in my video I'm going to be eating him" (qtd. in Rogers 87). This completely sums up her opinion of men. She obviously feels that women should have dominance over men, if one of the genders has to overrule the other.

In a song earlier mentioned called "Precious Things," Tori expresses her anger toward males in general. She sings,

I wanna smash the faces of those beautiful BOYS,
Those Christian boys.
So, you can make me cum.
That doesn't make you Jesus.

Her point strongly made here is that men—or boys, rather—have no divinity, no matter what they do that makes them think highly of themselves. They hold no true
authority, in her opinion. This is why she compares them to Jesus who supposedly has all the power possible for one to have.

Another song dealing with the theme of men's power over women is "Tear in Your Hand." A part of its chorus is,

You don't know
The power that you have
With that tear in your hand.

With this line she wraps up the whole meaning of the song. She is talking about a man who broke her heart by leaving her for someone else. In saying that he holds power with her tear in his hand, she expresses her anger at the power he holds over her because she loves him. It frustrates her that a man can control her emotions and dictate her sadness.

Still dealing with the theme of men's domination is a song called "Muhammad my Friend." Her first few lines are,

Muhammad, my friend, it's time to tell the world
We both know it was a girl back in Bethlehem.
And on that fateful day, when she was crucified
She wore a Shiseido Red, and we drank tea by her side.

This song is very symbolic because she is implying that Jesus could have very well have been a girl; therefore, males should not be so cocky. She is passionately saying that just because the most admirable person who ever lived happened to be a man, he didn’t necessarily have to be. Also, she suggests that all men are not admirable by any means.

Tori's song that expresses the most frustration with men's domination of women is "Me and a Gun." This song is about a certain incident that changed her
life when she was twenty one. She had given a show in Los Angeles one night and agreed to give a member of the audience a ride home and was raped (Michael 32). Throughout the whole song, she talks about how she felt so powerless and how she was so furious that because of his gender, he was so puissant. He held her face down with a gun to her head, and he tragically invaded her. Painfully, she says that she sings the song “as a way of healing the place inside myself that has been hurt, enraged, and numbed by violence” (qtd. in Rogers 93). The lyrics discuss the agony she felt as well as her frustration and fear. She says in one part of the song,

Yes, I wore a slinky red thing--

Does that mean I should spread

For you, your friends your father, Mr. Ed?

This one line says so much about the mindset of our society. Men think a woman asks for it with her choice of clothes. Not only do men think this, but society in general thinks this. Isn't this one question that the courts always ask? What Tori is saying is that no man has the power to rightfully take something so sacred away from a woman, no matter what the circumstances. Evidently, she believes men and women should be completely equal.

Tori Amos is obviously an awesome musician. She has such a gift in expressing her feelings with such poetic and honest lyrics. It is amazing how Tori addresses these subjects so passionately through her songs. These two prominent themes found in Tori's music are rarely found in any others. This is because Tori obviously has a deeper devotion inside herself that only music can express. Openly sharing this she says, “...I take that stage and that piano and demon girls come out. There are things that I refuse to deal with except through my music; things I will
only deal with through my music...because I don’t trust humanity that much and I
don’t know if I trust me that much. But I trust the songs” (qtd. in Michael 11).

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