

## Chapter Five

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# Using Non-Writing to Analyze Reading

Many of the alternate strategies discussed so far regarding the teaching of writing can be modified for use in classes where students are analyzing or critiquing texts, often a crucial part of a writing task. This might include courses in textual studies, linguistics, English education, children's literature, rhetoric or composition theory, literary or cultural criticism, or courses across the curriculum. Instructors should consider how visualization, physical activity, or other non-writing work might demonstrate, at least analogously, a concept relevant to course readings. Such approaches do not take the place of reading, but they can supplement whatever intellectual processes people use to explore, compare, analyze, or problematize texts. This chapter discusses select activities meant to spark the imagination of instructors committed to using multiple ways of knowing in a variety of classes. Before using these or related activities, of course, instructors should make them consistent to their own course goals and philosophical beliefs about learning. What is it that students should "know" or be able to do at the end of this assignment, class, course, or program? What intellectual processes should a reading, discussion, writing or other project help students develop?<sup>1</sup>

### **North's "Fusion" Model and His Students' "Recombinatory" Projects**

In his recent book, *Refiguring the Ph.D. in English Studies*, Stephen M. North (with Barbara A. Chepaitis, David Coogan, Lâle Davidson, Ron MacLean, Cindy L. Parrish, Jonathan Post, and Beth Weatherby)

describes a number of performance-based projects his graduate students did in response to theoretical readings. His description of their work provides a good starting place for the suggestions in this chapter. First, some context: North proposes that English departments use the friction of their conflicts productively to create a “fusion-based” curriculum, one that would bring the “disparate elements together under sufficient pressure and with sufficient energy to transform them into a single new entity, one quite distinct from any of the original components” (73).<sup>2</sup>

In his description of a course he has taught representative of those offered in the fusion model, North lists a number of different genres graduate students in his History of English Studies have used in addition to traditional essays: “short stories, text-only and text-and-image collages, poems, taped audio performances (in the manner of a radio broadcast), plays and scripted skits, StorySpace constructions and Web sites, first-person narratives, puzzles, videos and multimedia productions, and so on” (132). He follows this list with three extended examples of how these projects were a melding of “topic, form and method” (132).

Even less traditional projects were produced by graduate students doing what North calls “recombinatory” writing, that is, a mixing of genres analogous to the “nexus of discourses” represented in SUNY Albany’s English department. He describes the resulting mergers as “the microresults of the program’s macroprocesses, (by)products of its ongoing fusion experiment. As such, they are often both unfamiliar and relatively unstable: strange, evanescent, short-lived creatures” (165). Two of the many examples he gives: One pair of students, in response to Jasper Neel’s book, *Plato, Derrida, and Writing*, constructed a “conversation” using selected passages from both Plato and Derrida. Another student wrote a parody, with Frederick Jameson as an operator of a dude ranch. (North’s descriptions of both of these need to be read for full effect.) He gives a longer account of one student’s final project in Composition Theory, which is a recombinatory piece that includes narration, dreamscape, multiple beginnings, reflections on the multiple beginnings, and a Venn diagram. North emphasizes that what distinguishes this project and others described in this section of his book is “the *relationship* it established among its discursively differentiated parts: the way it brought together, and in particular coordinated, topics, forms, and methods traditionally associated with rhetoric and composition, creative writing, and personal autobiography” (his emphasis, 179–84).

In a section both acknowledging and critiquing “the primacy of print” in English Studies, North recommends performance as a relatively uncharted opportunity in which to explore ideas, discourses, and alternative formats. He points out the irony that in spite of English instructors’ need to use performance-related skills such as speaking and

moving in their teaching, department meetings, conferences, etc., these skills have not been considered important, and students have not been taught these skills directly. Instead, students must depend on an “unarticulated pattern of socialization” (189). Because performance is still relatively uncharted territory in English Studies, North argues, it might be “a useful medium for fusion experiments, a largely unpoliced arena in which to (re)combine elements from across intradisciplinary lines” (189–90).

He gives a partial list of what some Albany graduate students have done with performance-related projects in The History of English Studies course: “marionette and puppet shows, room-sized floor puzzles, poems performed in multiple voices, multimedia presentations (e.g., video- and audiotape supplemented with PowerPoint), in-class presentations for voice and saxophone, installations—you get the idea” (190).

The point is we can use the power generated by epistemological and other differences in most English departments as a generative rather than destructive force: “the object would be to harness the energy generated by the conflicts in order to forge some new disciplinary enterprise altogether” (73). The most electrifying moments of fusion would occur in class projects (not “papers”) as graduate students of many persuasions (rhetoricians, compositionists, linguists, creative writers, cultural critics, educators, literary theorists, etc.) would grapple together with readings and reactions, forging “recombinatory” projects in which form and content blur and spark. The potential and the problem of such intellectual work would force all involved to rethink and revisit conventional assumptions about writing, reading, interpreting text, as well as the overall purpose of English Studies.

## Multiple Intelligences in the Secondary Schools

On the secondary school level, there are a number of people who have suggested multi-model strategies, especially in literature classes. College professors have much to learn from them about working with different modalities. Even if students are to do something as simple as summarize a writer’s argument, they might supplement a conventional written summary by taking advantage of “multiple channels” to help them conceptualize ideas, concepts, or opinions in the readings. Alternate strategies can also help students analyze text on multiple levels of understanding, analysis, and critique.

Peter Smagorinsky, in *Expressions*, discusses many options for using multiple intelligences in interpreting literary texts: provide musical background to an oral reading of the text; put on a puppet show; do a

parody, a sculpture, a collage, a dance, a map, or a mix of photos, video, or hypermedia in a presentation about a text. In their book *Inside Out: Developmental Strategies for Teaching Writing*, Dan Kirby, Tom Liner, and Ruth Vinz suggest similar approaches: having students design a book jacket for the novel under discussion, or create a map illustrating the character's main actions (176).

In 1995, there was an entire issue of *English Journal* (the NCTE publication for secondary-level) devoted to multiple intelligences (M-I). In most articles, the stated or assumed purpose of most of the strategies is to help students "interpret literature," with little or no questioning of which texts are considered "literature," what kinds of interpretations are used, or why. Nevertheless, the strategies can be adapted in a variety of text-centered college courses and used to help students engage the readings from a number of perspectives. Smagorinsky, also writing in the M-I issue of *English Journal*, has his students do "transmediations" (he cites Suhor's use of the term), or interpretations of one genre using another. For example, in response to Williams' story "The Use of Force," Smagorinsky's students might draw a picture, choreograph a dance, create a soundtrack, or write a drama (22).

These suggestions are similar to my use of "companion pieces" and "parallel stories" as a way to respond to a text. When I taught a women's literature course several years ago, I offered as an option to a conventional paper that students could write a companion piece or parallel story to the play or piece of fiction we discussed in class. These pieces could take several forms: a prequel or sequel to a story; a story or dramatic scene from a different character's point of view; a contemporary retelling of an older piece; or a parallel story using a format similar to the one we read for class. For example, they could write an original story using the daydream/reality pattern from "The Secret Life of Walter Mitty," or from Ambrose Bierce's "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." One young woman wrote a re-telling of Zora Neale Hurston's "The Gilded Six Bits," a story in which the writer experiments with omniscient and objective point of view to achieve a certain effect. This student retold the story in first person, from Missie May's point of view, completely changing what gets emphasized, which in turn makes Hurston's choices even more meaningful. These companion pieces sometimes stand alone as implied commentary on the original text, or they can be contextualized explicitly within a theoretical framework. Original dramatizations of fictional work can be discussed in class or used to launch further analyses.

In another article in the M-I issue of *English Journal*, Richard Gage has over fifty options his students can choose from for their literature projects. They might design library displays, mobiles, plot diagrams, time lines, character portraits, or CD jackets. They might do small-

group role-plays of epilogues to texts such as *The Glass Menagerie*, where students act out possible future plans for the main characters. Gage cites Judith C. Reiff as suggesting that hyperactivity diagnoses in children may be a failure to recognize and use kinesthetic talents. Citing Walter Barbe and Michael Milone, Gage points out that people who learn kinesthetically comprise about 15 percent of the population (53).

Bruce Pirie, who also had a piece in that special issue, has his students interpret William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* by having them design "choral readings" that foreground important exchanges in the novel between the characters. Here is his description:

groups of students copy down lines said by Jack or Ralph (one character assigned per group)—lines that highlight the tension emerging between the two boys. When they string these quotations together, the groups have, in effect, created monologues to be delivered chorally, with movements, face-to-face against an "opposing" group—a "Jack" group and a "Ralph" group presenting their monologues to each other in sequence. ("Jack" groups often invade the space of the "Ralph" group, encircling or penetrating the other group, a kinesthetic embodiment of Jack's aggressive drive.) (47)

He then combines this kinesthetic, oral, and visual activity by having students discuss and write about it afterward. As Pirie points out, kinesthetic approaches do not isolate only one talent: "Typically, students move (kinesthetically), see others move (visually), talk about it (verbally and interpersonally), and reflect on it (intrapersonally)" (50). Pirie employs a number of other conceptualizations. Students, in silence, walk in slow motion the way a literary character might, or become "statues" representing a character, or dramatize "dreamscapes" inspired by characters dreamt adventures in *The Divine Comedy*, *Alice in Wonderland*, and *A Christmas Carol* (47–48).<sup>3</sup>

Pirie warns about dangers that students may view "fun" activities as a frivolous escape from what is perceived as a more serious "meaning-making mode." To counter this, he tells students that after the activity is over, they will have to discuss it or write about it (49). It is sad that he must to begin this way, but given received judgments in society about enjoyment, drudgery, and learning, as John Mayher has shown, it might be necessary. Colleagues' views may also be entrenched against taking these approaches seriously. Pirie recounts, "When I offered teachers a workshop called Learning English Through the Body, a friendly skeptic asked, 'Is that as opposed to through the brain?'" As Pirie points out, that question is a false opposition. Similarly, Peter Smagorinsky says that some of his more skeptical colleagues commented that students were just "playing games" (20).

There are other suggestions from that M-I issue. Bill Tucker points out that Hemingway drew inspiration for his writing using Cezanne's paintings as an artistic muse (27), a fact that might help some students respect alternative strategies more than they sometimes do. Jacqueline N. Glasgow and Margie S. Bush use a Lego project in a complex project in which students design and build a children's toy out of Legos, write a proposal, instruction manual, and advertising campaign to market it, and then give an oral presentation covering the entire project (32–37). Wendy Simeone has students make original films about such texts as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Wiesel's *Night*. The students' films include "authentic film documentations" spliced into them, along with original dramatizations of the texts and/or musical accompaniment. Some of her students used Japanese dolls in a dramatization of a Japanese myth. She also has students do sketches of American and African proverbs, noting that those who do the best drawings are not always the best writers (60–62). Smagorinsky has good advice about the use of these strategies, relevant to their use at all levels: "The introduction of multiple intelligence activities must be accompanied by large changes in the values of the classroom, and concomitant changes in what students believe to be appropriate and acceptable ways of thinking and communicating in an English class" (25).

### Alternate Strategies in College Classes

In my advanced exposition class, I use an exercise similar to Pirie's for *Lord of the Flies* to help students analyze nonfiction texts. In preparation for essays students were going to be writing on "voice," my class was reading essays on "academic" versus "everyday" language, including opinions regarding the "English only" controversy. One day we were discussing separate essays by Richard Rodriguez and Victor Villanueva, anthologized in the *Living Languages* collection (Buffington, Diogenes, and Moneyhun 1997). First I had students write for about five minutes the endings of the following sentences:

In "Aria," Richard Rodriguez argues that . . ."

In "Whose Voice Is It, Anyway?" Victor Villanueva critiques Rodriguez's position on language. Villanueva argues that . . ."

Then I called on people to read the ends of their sentences. This was to establish that everyone more or less understood Rodriguez's and Villanueva's fairly clear—and opposed—positions on bilingual education, "standard" English, and assimilation. As discussed in a previous chapter, Rodriguez sees school English as the key to success, though he acknowledges some loss of connection with family in learning it. Villanueva sees racism as a factor complicating students' assimilation into

mainstream society, with or without “proper English.” He draws a distinction between “immigrants,” people whose ancestors came to America by choice, and “minorities,” people whose ancestors did not come by choice or who were colonized. While he sympathizes with some of Rodriguez’s anecdotes regarding both the pain and reward of learning English, he takes issue with Rodriguez’s view of “standard English” as the key to success for everyone. I should add here that students were not very good at summarizing the two views. Many thought Rodriguez was in favor of bilingual education and that Villanueva agreed with him. Since the issue Rodriguez and Villanueva were debating in print was an important one, especially to ideas of “voice” in student writing, I wanted to do more with these readings, and with the discussion about them, which, given the provocative nature of the Rodriguez/Villanueva written debate, should have been livelier.

### *The Six-Headed Debate*

After the preparation described above, students participated in a “six-headed debate.” Here’s what we did: I made one half of the room (about eight people) the “Rodriguez side” and the other half the “Villanueva side.” First I had students find examples of rhetorical strategies used by their essayist. I gave examples such as Rodriguez calling bilingual education a “scheme” instead of a plan, and using dialogue, family anecdotes, and direct quotations in sections. In Villanueva’s piece, there are long, vivid descriptions/analogies about “ethnic” food in supermarkets, showing how much food from immigrants is in the “regular” aisles, but that Mexican food is still in the “ethnic” aisle. He uses this to dispel the analogy of “the melting pot.” At one point he says, “No more soup.”

Students caught on to this quickly and found other samples of rhetorical strategies. One student pointed out that Rodriguez intersperses Spanish words into his English sentences to show/juxtapose the conflicted emotions he was feeling as he learned “the public language.” Another pointed out his depiction of his family’s house as a metaphor for how he felt in school: “Our house stood apart—gaudy yellow in a row of white bungalows” (99). Other people found lots of other examples of rhetorical strategies. In addition to providing background reading for essays students were currently writing on “voice,” which could be about voice or could demonstrate voice, or both, we were discussing rhetorical strategies partly in preparation for another assignment later in the semester (the rhetorical analysis project discussed in Chapter 3). I find if we do “live” rhetorical analysis in class a bit at a time, students find it easier to do on their own.

That preparatory work took about fifteen minutes. Then I told them that in a few minutes there would be a debate between Richard

Rodriguez and Victor Villanueva, and that they'd have a few minutes to prepare themselves to take part in the debate as Rodriguez or Villanueva. I asked each side to talk in two smaller groups about their writer's main argument, best evidence (metaphors, personal anecdote, statistics, history, etc.), and to anticipate the opponent's argument in order to be ready with a response. They had about five minutes to huddle in this way before the debate.

Then I arranged six chairs in the center of the room: three on one side, and three on the other, facing the other three. Because I was having three "Rodríguezes" facing three "Villanuevas," I selected three people from each side of the room to sit in the six chairs. I told them, "This is a debate on a talk show between Rodriguez and Villanueva. I'm putting three on each side so that you're not up there by yourself." (Although this was a hypothetical debate between only two men, I figured three students on each side would help keep the conversation going, plus it wouldn't put one student on the spot to carry the whole side. They could support each other.) The rest of us watched from an outer circle—the other "Rodríguezes" more or less behind the three in the middle, and the other "Villanuevas" behind their teammates in the center.

This was the statement up for debate: "Learning 'standard' English is the key to success in American society." It took a while to get going. At one point, the Villanueva side was questioning the concept of standard English and what constituted it anyway—that there were so many versions of English, it didn't make sense to insist on one way of speaking. Matt Vaughn, who was a "Rodríguez," then commented on the question in Spanish—which was startling. "Touché," said another student. It instantly demonstrated that someone speaking Spanish in a conventional English classroom might be considered an outsider. Then Anita, also on the Rodriguez side, said that English was the "language of power," but no one picked up that point yet.

The Villanueva side was struggling. They kept restating Villanueva's main point, which was that "immigrants" and "minorities" were different groups from different ancestors, here under different circumstances, and that "standard" English would *not* be a ticket to success for minorities because of racism. But they were not supporting that view with the compelling evidence and examples Villanueva used in his essay.

At this point, I jumped in as a kind of talk-show host: "Professor Villanueva," I began, "you've sometimes spoken of an incident in which as a child you accompanied your father on an apartment-hunting trip. Could you tell us about that?" The Villanuevas quickly skimmed that section of the essay and one of them began, "When I was a boy, I went with my father to find an apartment . . ." (The story is that the apartment owner, thinking that Villanueva and his father were Puerto Ricans,



said there were no vacancies. When the father chatted informally with him and said they were from Spain, suddenly there was a vacancy.) The incident supports Villanueva's views that while "minorities" are discriminated against, "immigrants" have a place in the "American Dream," a place to which "minorities" are prevented, by racism, from going. After reading a section of that anecdote, the Villanuevas were able to ad-lib the rest of their response. Then the other side responded, this time with several people wanting to speak at once, and the debate became lively.

I also used this debate in my afternoon class. Again, each side had "coaches" who helped prepare the debaters, but I increased to about fifteen minutes the time they had to do so. As I went between the two groups to help, I realized that some of the Villanueva people completely misunderstood Rodriguez's point. Because Rodriguez starts out saying what a hard time he had and how English interfered with his life with his mother and father, some in this group thought that Rodriguez was in favor of bilingual education. They completely missed how he uses that opening to set the stage for his main argument. It's like he's saying, "Even though I had a hard time and leaving the home language is painful, I'm glad I did because it allowed me to have a public voice." Many readers did not see this as his setup but as his "thesis." They thought the pain he felt learning English was his main point and therefore he was in favor of bilingual education.<sup>4</sup>

The Rodriguez group in the later class seemed to be focusing too much on minorities taking responsibility for learning English, which was *part* of Rodriguez's point, but it seemed to me that this group was not sufficiently addressing Villanueva's distinction between immigrants and minorities. They were not focusing enough on how society views these groups differently, which is key to Villanueva's argument about the role racism plays in some groups being unable to fully assimilate. At that point one of the "coaches" asked if she could jump in, and I said yes. She drew people's attention to a passage later in the essay that clearly articulated the point Rodriguez was building toward, and then the main debaters began referring to passages from the text to support the different views. Both classes flew by. We laughed a lot during this multisensory, participatory, and challenging class, and we discussed serious issues surrounding "standard" English, stereotypes, and racism.

This six-headed debate is not a flawless recipe for great class discussions and wonderfully insightful interpretations. However, it supports several ideas worth emphasizing here. First, all students must literally take a side in an important controversy about language and racism, but taking on the arguments of writers on different sides makes a difficult discussion a bit safer for individuals. Second, the debate draws attention to both essays' powerful rhetorical strategies, which students could now

notice in other readings. Being consciously aware of a writer's rhetorical proofs makes readers a little less vulnerable to them. Now that students could see how anecdotes, statistics, or metaphors worked in a persuasive text, they might use them in their own, where appropriate. Third, this debate in the personas of the experts—Rodriguez and Villanueva—also helps students identify with the writers. For a few minutes, they have to speak *as if* they have had the past experiences of either man. It helps them participate in Elbow's "believing game," which asks readers to believe a writer for a while before jumping to instant "doubting" or critique. In this debate, even if someone disagrees with Rodriguez, for example, she has to more or less accurately represent his views as she represents him in the debate.

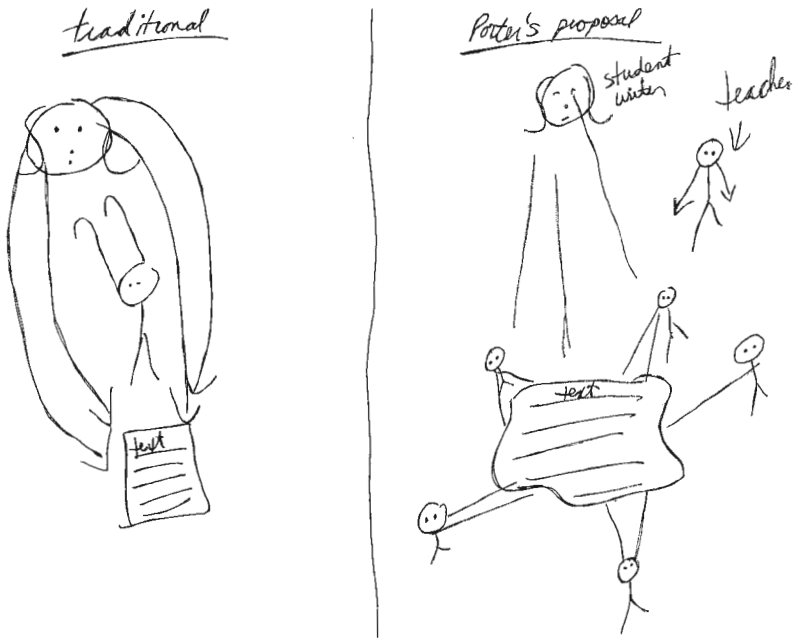
Finally, this modified "talk-show" debate is multisensory. For those who learn better auditorially, it is a more compelling approach than simply asking students to read paragraphs in an essay. They have to do something orally with what they found. In fact, one person, who had found a good paragraph to use in the debate but had trouble paraphrasing it, said something like, "To illustrate what I mean, I'd like to quote from an article I wrote several years ago on this subject . . ."—and then she read a bit from the book. People laughed, but she did it in a way consistent with the "talk-show" format, and it was effective. This debate forces people used to writing their summaries or comments (in this case mostly English majors or minors) to ad-lib in a dramatic situation. The writers' different views are juxtaposed with every exchange. The debaters have to think fast and articulate as they go—in response to the three people sitting across from them. As is the case with other alternative strategies, it is sometimes surprising which students excel at this kind of intellectual exercise.

### *Sketching or Mapping a Reading*

Since sketching or mapping a draft seemed to give students insights in my writing classes, I decided to use that approach in a graduate course that required much reading. One night in my Composition theory class, a course for all new graduate teaching assistants, I used sketches to help students conceptualize a reading, James Porter's well-known essay, "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community." Giving students about ten minutes, I asked them to draw a visual representation of Porter's critique of traditional Composition theory and practice, as well as his proposed alternate model. To summarize: Porter critiques what he sees as composition textbooks' pervasive, idealized, and romantic view of the original, autonomous text. He argues that all texts are intertexts, comprised of traces of infinite other texts and constrained by specific discourse communities. He says, "readers, not writers, create discourse" (38). By extension, Porter argues, writing pedagogy should not be fo-

**Figure 5-1**

My drawing of Porter's critique of composition



cused, as it is now on prodding the individual writer's brain for original thoughts contained therein, but rather, helping the writer analyze the community at which the text is aimed, the community of readers who ultimately play a large role in shaping the text. "Intertextuality suggests that our goal should be to help students learn to write for the discourse communities they choose to join" (42).

While the students set to work, I produced my own primitive sketch of how I saw traditional conceptions of writer writing, compared to Porter's conception of text being shaped by readers. (See Figure 5-1.)

The sketch shows a teacher standing between the writer and her text, coaxing ideas from the writer's brain, which go directly to a stable, rectangle-shaped text. In this conventional view, the teacher encourages the writer to look within herself for "her ideas," which can then be transferred to her writing. In my sketch of Porter's model, the teacher is still between the writer and her text, but now the teacher is pointing to the many members of the discourse community, who stand around and shape the evolving text. The text is no longer a stable rectangle, but is an amoeba-like amalgam, whose shape shifts as different members of the discourse community push and pull on it. In this

model, the teacher's task is to help the student become aware of constraints put on her writing by those others, all of which have a hand, literally, in this sketch, on the writer's text.

After I had put a quick sketch on my paper, I headed to the board in the back of the room to put it up there. I said if anyone else felt like doing so, they could put their sketch on the front or back board, and that there was plenty of chalk, all different colors. I didn't have to ask specific people. Six of the eleven people put their sketches up. This took only about five minutes. We all finished at about the same time, and one by one we explained our models. I must admit that I was excited about my sketch and wanted to go first. Students seemed a bit stunned by this task, but also fascinated and quite engaged. Each person who drew on the board explained his or her work with much animation. As they talked through their visual representation, their explanations of Porter's ideas were lucid and detailed.

Why do something like this? First of all, the act of drawing, like the act of writing, is a heuristic to help them make sense of Porter's important and still radical view of how writing is taught, versus how he thinks it should be taught. When people explain their sketches, they have a visual prop to help them talk through their explanation. Classmates can ask for details and clarification, and everyone gets a number of useful visualizations and metaphors to help them understand Porter's model of writing and pedagogy and to juxtapose it to other models. Each one was different; each used a different format (stick figures, maps, Venn diagram, graphs, and visual metaphors).

If blackboards or whiteboards aren't available, there are other ways to do these visual representations. Students could bring to class, or the instructor could provide, transparencies and markers. They could then explain their sketch on the overhead projector and would not need that five minutes to redraw it on the board. They might use PowerPoint or drawing software; they could show it on a common screen or via a networked system. Or, students could visit individual computer monitors as each artist explains the conceptualization. If nothing else is available, they can use posters or flip charts. While students can do this work at home in preparation for class, I prefer the drama of doing it together, live, as we all grapple with the written texts. People only need 5 to 10 minutes to produce a primitive sketch like the one I did. And then they need only a few minutes each to explain their sketch. It is well worth the time.

### *Acting out Scenes—A Personal Example*

During the last semester of my senior year in college, I took a Shakespeare course from Tom Littlefield, an English professor at SUNY Albany who had a strong interest in drama. He always held his class in an

odd-shaped classroom in the basement of the Humanities building, but the room had a small raised platform in the front that could be used as a stage. As an alternative to writing a research paper on a Shakespeare play, he said, we could act out some scenes. We'd have to be familiar with the lines and rehearse. In the class that semester was a drama major, several people like me who had a minor in drama or who had taken some acting classes, and several more people who would do almost anything to avoid another literature paper. We jumped at the chance to "put on a play."

Ultimately, we acted out five scenes taken from Acts IV and V of *Othello*. Gordy, the drama major, directed us. I was Desdemona. We memorized our lines and put together minimum costumes and props, appropriating miscellaneous tables or chairs from the building when we needed them. We rehearsed many nights, on our own time, whenever the classroom was free.

Our director said that in order to speak the lines with some depth, we had to know what every word meant. This involved studying the extended footnotes in the Riverside edition and following up with historical explanations from the *OED*. I never learned as much about a play, the times, or possible interpretations by doing a paper, and I never had more fun in a class. Even now, *Othello* is my favorite play, and I can still remember whole passages from Acts IV and V—not that memorization is the reason for doing Shakespeare. What texts we read and why is something each instructor must work out herself. My point is that my participation in dramatizing a part of a play is my most vivid memory of any class I took in four years of college.

Because that Shakespeare class from my undergraduate days is still so vivid to me, I gave my students at Utica College in an Introduction to Literature class the option of acting out scenes from a play in lieu of writing a paper. One group did an impressive classroom production of *Plumes*, by Georgia Douglas Johnson. They had costumes, props, and had memorized the lines. I could tell from their line delivery that they had discussed the play and the complex social factors that influenced the African American protagonist's agonizing decision not to employ a white doctor to treat her dying daughter. This day happened over five years ago, and it is one of the most memorable classes in my teaching career.

### *Multi-Modal "Rounds"*

I also use alternative formats to help undergraduates connect with difficult readings. In my rhetorical theory class, students have quite a bit of reading to do: the Crowley and Hawhee *Ancient Rhetorics* text, plus a substantial reading packet with complex rhetorical analyses. I knew if we were going to discuss these in class with any depth, students

would have to prepare themselves. I designed a series of “rounds,” in which students would use oral, written, visual, 3-D, and other modes in which they responded to the readings via overhead sketches of concepts, voice-mail responses, e-mailed journal entries, peer responses to those entries, as well as oral presentations of some kind. These responses would count as 20 percent of the course grade, and each person had a chance to respond in each of five different formats. In each round:

- five people do an oral reading log (a 1- to 2-minute call to my voice mail before class).
- five people write a 250-word e-mail to me, cc to class.
- five people write a brief e-mail response to those five, and copies to the class and to me.
- five people prepare an overhead transparency. This is a drawn, sketched, or graphed response to the reading(s) of the day. It should be completed before class with a fine-point, wet-erase marker on one sheet of overhead projector film, which the student should be prepared to place on the overhead and explain/discuss with the class.
- five people prepare a 3-D response. This is a 5- to 15-minute response that may be one of a number of things: a declamation, a debate, a Greek fashion show, a skit, a scene, a dialogue, a sculpture, a 3-D model, a dance, a song, a relevant game, and so on.

The rounds generated many kinds of responses, different in quality and in approach. For one of the “3-D” presentations, there was a “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?”-style game show using definition-type questions from the Crowley and Hawhee text—providing us with a simple but surprisingly riveting testing of words such as *kairos*, *ethos*, *enargeia*, *commonplace*, *epideictic*, etc. This game obviously did not involve analytical thinking, but it was a dramatic and participatory review of terms useful for students of rhetoric to have at their fingertips. Derek used pre-made signs in an interesting sketch to show how metaphors are used in technical writing. He was able to show how what we were reading in our class was different from, but related to, rhetorical work in technical writing classes. Someone else did a rhetorical analysis of letters to the editor in the college newspaper, followed days later by someone else doing a rhetorical analysis of an *Amistad*-related debate going on in the e-mailed portion of the rounds. That is, one student led the class in a discussion of rhetorical strategies used in her classmate’s e-mailed comments about an issue we had been discussing in class. I held my breath during this presentation, hoping the writer of

the e-mail argument would not take offense. She seemed to enjoy it, however, and helped analyze her own words and phrases.

In another e-mailed entry, part of the “rounds” assignment, one student took a suggestion from the text to experiment with grammatical person—switching a paragraph from third person to “I” or “you”—and discuss the effect of the change. She chose some well-known advertising slogans and discussed the rhetorical effects of changing, for example, “You’re in good hands with Allstate,” to “I’m in good hands . . .,” or “We’re in good hands,” or “They’re in good hands.” We also wrote online about subtle rhetorical differences in altered versions of the “Just do it” Nike slogan:

“I just do it.”

“People just do it.”

“You just do it.”

This was a written discussion, but it took place outside of class time via e-mail to everyone in the class, which they could read at times most convenient to them.

Ellen and Keri did a joint presentation on commonplaces. They wrote bumper-sticker sayings on the board, the first one from Teresa, who gave them, “I love my country but fear my government.” They discussed ideologies reflected in that statement and in another one that came from the class, “Charleton Heston is my president.” Keri put on a reference to lyrics from the music group Phish: “Tires are the things on the car that make contact with the road.” The subsequent discussion they led established the importance of context, intertextuality, and kairotic elements necessary for bumper-sticker readers to understand the Charleton Heston reference as well as the allusion to the Phish lyrics.

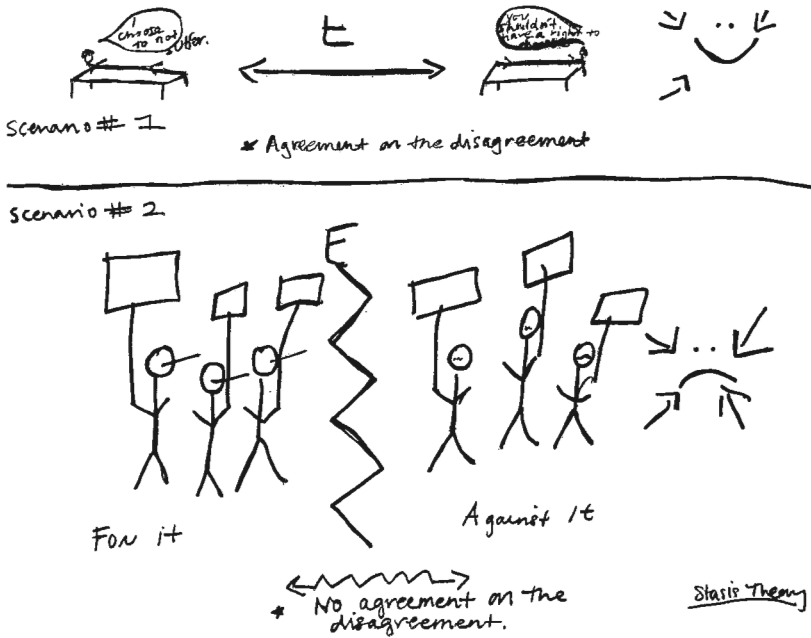
Nancy used her turn at the overhead transparency to demonstrate stasis theory. The top panel, with a smiling face on the right side, shows people disagreeing about living wills, but they are in stasis. (See Figure 5–2.) That is, they agree on what it is, exactly, that they disagree about:

“I choose not to suffer.”

“You shouldn’t have a right to choose.”

In contrast, Nancy’s bottom panel shows two groups of people carrying placards and yelling things at each other. The unhappy face depicted on the right indicates that the groups have not reached stasis: there is “no agreement on the disagreement.” Nancy used the overhead to discuss more complex examples of stasis theory from the Crowley and Hawhee text. For people having trouble with the readings, and several people indicated on their voice-mail or e-mail comments that

**Figure 5-2**  
 Arguers reaching, then failing to reach, stasis



they were, Nancy's visual depiction of stasis and lack-of-stasis provided a good point of departure for class discussion. She showed that people setting out to discuss euthanasia who begin by saying, "Euthanasia should be (should not be) legal" would immediately need to address questions of definition.

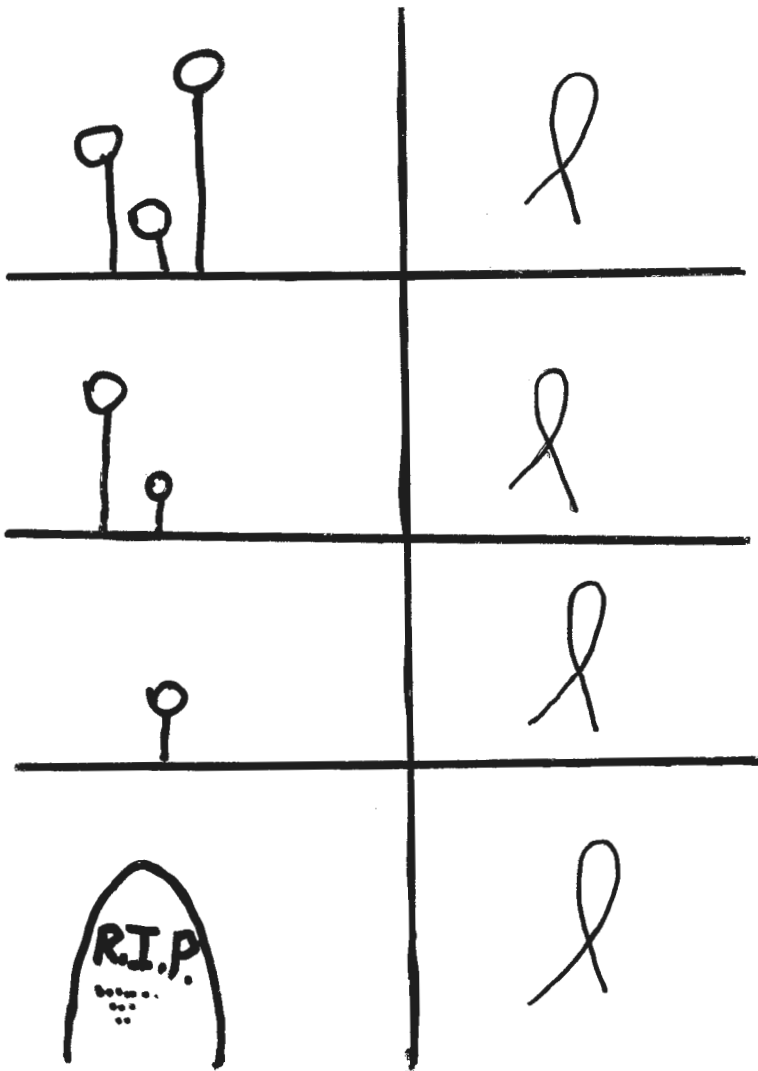
For her overhead presentation, Teresa did a simple but effective transparency showing how visual rhetoric could be used to dramatize the AIDS epidemic in Africa. In each box on the right side, in red, is the symbol for AIDS research. The top left box has minimalist drawings of a mother, father, and child. The next box shows the father gone. He is dead from AIDS. The next panel shows the mother gone, with only the orphan remaining. The last panel shows only a grave. The child has also succumbed to the epidemic. (See Figure 5-3.)

Teresa's sketch showed the power of visual rhetoric and the stark reality of what AIDS is doing to families in Africa. She discussed how complex explanations of the epidemic or lists of statistics might be enhanced rhetorically by a minimalist drawing.

In the same rhetoric theory class, we also used sketches routinely in class work to help students contrast epistemological differences be-



**Figure 5-3**  
Visual rhetoric to underscore the AIDS crisis in Africa



tween ancient and modern rhetorics or to represent concepts in some of the complex readings we were doing. We also used sketches midway through a long analysis project as a way for students to step back from their drafts to see if they were happy with the framework (see Elizabeth's in Chapter 3).

*Sketches on the Final Exam*

Interestingly, on the final exam in this course, two students used unsolicited sketches to enhance their written answers. Writing about Jane Tompkins's critique of what is conventionally valued in American literary criticism, one student illustrated the status of different texts in the literary canon (Shakespeare's versus Harriet Beecher Stowe's). Here is the question Robert was answering:

Relate Jane Tompkins's argument about literary history to Jeanne Fahnestock's and Marie Secor's argument about literary history and epideictic rhetoric. How do these views regarding the reception of certain texts as "literature" impact the reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*? Discuss another literary text you know about and explain how it does or does not fit the "shared criteria" Fahnestock and Secor say appear to be important in the literary criticism they read from 1978–1982. Why does any of this matter?

Here's what Robert wrote in answer to question #2. The brackets indicate the handwritten portion I could not make out.

Jane Tompkins and Fahnestock are related to each other in their seemingly overall view of literary history. Both works seem to suggest that it revolves around who literature caters to and who sets the criteria.

In both works, the authors are showing how those who held the power set the outcome for the literary circle. This to them is wrong and these paradigms need to be redefined and understood in a different light.

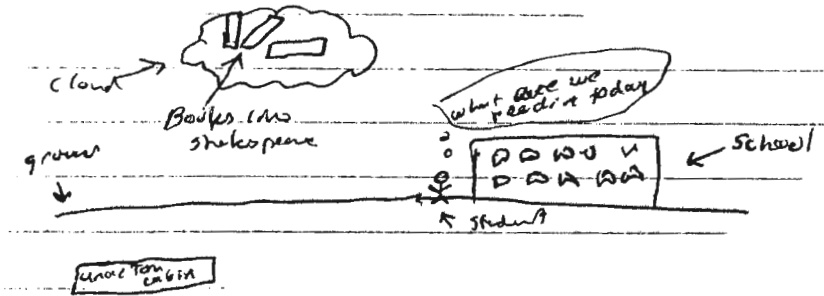
In Fahnestock and Secor, the two authors simply tear apart the idea of literary criticism. To them, it is a waste of time and simply is a group who defines what's good and bad. The question remains, what is the criteria for this? Simply because one book or text is better for discussion does not make it a better piece of work. This is what literary criticism and history is about; these books can be discussed, torn apart, and rediscovered for the profile. So, when Tompkins talks about a book that has "sentimental power," it could never fit this category?!

This is how they all relate: the idea of a need to revise how we look, judge, and set criteria in the literary world. For example, on p. 175 Tompkins states that the idea of the literary circle not being able to accept a work like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is because of how [ ? ] defines the terms. As Oravec says, these also define the terms in the argument. In this case, a book that holds no argument purpose can not be of value. This is wrong and when authors are arguing for a revision in the way literary circles are judged.

If those who set the criteria redefined how books are judged, a book like *Uncle Tom's Cabin* would move into the literary canon. In my picture [that] I drew for the Tompkins piece, I drew something similar to this. (See Figure 5–4.)

Figure 5-4

An exam sketch of the canon controversy; Shakespeare in the “clouds” of the canon; *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the “cellar”



In Robert’s sketch, a stick-figure student is at a school asking, “What are we reading today?” Meanwhile, the book *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is below a sketched line, relegated to the “cellar,” under a cloud filled with “books on Shakespeare.” Here is how Robert describes his sketch:

In this picture, for a book like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to move out of the cellar and reach the clouds (the literary canon), the idea of how things are defined and the criteria must be reevaluated! Those who define the terms of engagement win.

I think that all the articles that we have read somewhat tie together with the works of Fahnestock and Secor. They all establish that how we define the terms and who sets these terms or [ ? ] have the “trump card” and will hold the power. The work of Sharon Crowley holds true to this statement. She looks at “taste” and how it is the group who hold the literary values and do not seem to feel anyone out or away from their “taste” is worth anything. Once again, these [ ? ] set the terms, define them, and get the [ ? ] hold all the power.

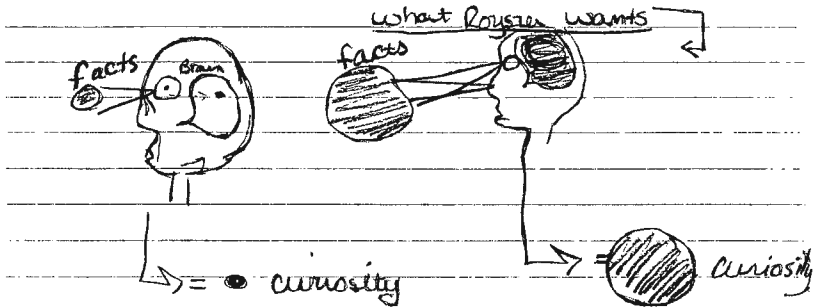
The same holds true with the works by Oravec and even Corder. Corder for example said in the literary circles argument—passed over what is looked at and viewed. As Oravec would say, it is all in who defines the terms.

It all matters because with all these arguments they hope to use rhetoric as the key to promoting change in the higher powers who set the criteria. For rhetoric is used all the time, regardless if you know it or not, and [through] it arguments about issues are made. Thus, the works that we have read all encourage rhetorical usage to make changes in those that are not right such as criteria and literary circles that define terms. In fact, they all seem to hold the common thread of criteria and invoking change in how this criteria for things is set.

Another student, Kim, also used a sketch to explain her answer on the final. She was addressing this question: “Explain Jacqueline Jones

**Figure 5-5**

An exam sketch showing positive effects of Royster's proposal



Royster's dissatisfaction with 'mainstream public discourses.' What does she propose as a way to address problems with public discourses? If her plan is successful, what differences might we see in public discourses of the future?" She drew a diagram to help her represent Jacqueline Jones Royster's critique of the public reception of the film *Amistad*. In Kim's sketch, she juxtaposes the way things are now (on the left) with the reform Royster is suggesting (on the right). In the left sketch, a person's brain is exposed to a small circle of facts, and as a result has a small amount of curiosity. (See Figure 5-5.)

In the "What Royster wants" side of the sketch, a person is exposed to a circle of facts about five times as large as the one on the left, and as a result, the person's "curiosity" is proportionately larger. I think the sketch provided a better explanation than her written answer:

The mainstream public discourses most likely keeps it [its] attention to the popular (majority) which is white Americans. For example, this would also be middle class. This is the material that is being accepted into a social canon. Royster believes we should begin to "produce thick descriptions" of people. For example a single quote cannot just be looked at from someone but the quotes and words before and after the quote. This will open rhetoric to more reality and truth because there will be more experience and information available about the searcher and the one being searched. There will be more to werk [sic] with so that the audience will be perusaded using rhetorical techniques. This would be beneficial [sic] for everyone. With more information to be learned there will be more to be read and watched. Im [sic] having a hard time putting this into werds [sic] so here is a diagram to help you understand more.

Kim answered this question last, so perhaps she was running out of time. Her written answer has a number of surface errors. They are not

typos, for this was handwritten. She does not include an explanation of the sketch, perhaps because of time constraints. I do think, however, it represents her answer better than her written account. It is in the sketch that she suggests that a reader's "curiosity" will be expanded by reading fuller accounts of "thick description."

These students' unsolicited use of sketches or diagrams to enhance their written answers could simply be due to their wish to impress a teacher they know encourages different representations. I prefer to think, of course, that sketches helped them with their papers earlier in the semester, and they used them on the final to help them discover or articulate their views.

Using alternative formats, multiple channels, or various intelligences to help our students (and ourselves) obtain broader, more complex conceptualizations of issues is an idea we should all investigate further. We must anticipate objections to such intellectual work, however, and be prepared to handle questions about it. As mentioned early in this chapter, Peter Smagorinsky, Bruce Pirie, and others who experimented with unconventional projects encountered skepticism from their colleagues, who doubted that these multisensory projects counted as "real" learning. Stephen North, too, acknowledged that performance pieces run the risk of being seen by some as "unserious/gimmicky/not what one expects from 'real intellectuals'" (191). This doubting may be even more prevalent in English departments at colleges and universities, where professors are judged less on their performance as teachers and more on the written texts they publish. How those of us who wish to experiment with alternate pedagogies might address this skepticism in our professional lives is addressed in the next chapter.

## Notes

1. In workshops I attended that Barbara Walvoord gave at Utica College in the early 1990s, she used a version of these questions.

2. See especially pages 73–77 of his book for a more complete description of the fusion model.

3. Pirie credits inspiration for these multisensory activities to these and other books:

Boal, Augusto. *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*. Translated by Adrian Jackson. New York: Routledge, 1992.

Blom, Lynne Anne, and L. Tarin Chaplin. *The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1988.

Wagner, Betty Jane. *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium*. London: Hutchinson, 1979.

4. This is not the first time I've seen students misread an article when the writer spends the first few paragraphs summarizing the debate or beginning with the other side. I think this is because many students have been programmed to think in five-paragraph-theme format: the thesis must come first, followed by support. They have trouble reading essays that depart from that formula—which are most essays. For a further discussion of this phenomenon, see my “Marginal Comments on Writers’ Texts: The Status of the Commenter as a Factor in Writing Center Tutorials,” in *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*, edited by Lynn Craigie Briggs and Meg Woolbright, 31–42. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.