ease. Whether or not this skill carries over into future essays is anyone's guess. However, I am satisfied and intend to use this type of lesson plan again.

University of Delaware

Using the Summary to Teach Critical Reading and Writing
Luise Van Keuren

Every teacher is familiar with vacuous silences in the classroom. They usually occur after a simple question has been asked, for example, "Who can tell us basically what happens in Frost's 'Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening'?" On the most literal level—in your own words—what happens in the poem?" Vacuous silence ensues. This phenomenon, one hopes that after two or three degrees' worth of proficiency, exposes the difference between two levels of learning of course, the teacher has acquired certain learning skills which have become second nature to him. The teacher takes up a novel, an essay, or a poem, and understands. He knows how to learn. The freshman English student, however, usually has yet to obtain this most fundamental part of his education. And the teacher often finds it difficult to return—mentally—to the stage of learning at which his students find themselves. For the teacher, past years fade away; he has forgotten what road he traveled by to reach his present abilities.

The recollection of the stages we progressed by may be eternally irrecoverable, but we can examine the present students are now. The most popular student method of learning is, unquestionably, the well-known "yellow felt marker technique." But notice that students do not wield this instrument in the same way their teachers would. They pick out isolated significant remarks, definitions, dates, catchy phrases, and anything else that seems "important." At the end of the process, the students recall separate ideas or examples, but a comprehensive understanding of what they have read remains elusive. A comprehensive understanding is precisely what the teacher inexplicably possesses at the conclusion of his reading of the same work. The teacher also checks salient points, albeit in pencil, and underlines notable passages. He may even carry on a running dialogue with the text in the margins. But unlike his student counterpart, the teacher has a different objective: he is seeking to perceive and sometimes to impose order in the material. Mentally, he is gathering up the material of a summary.

The basic college composition course usually includes reading assignments in which the summarizing skill can be practiced. In
most cases, non-fiction is more susceptible to student summary than
are fiction or poetry. But even beginning with a clear argumentative
essay, the teacher soon finds that teaching the summary is no simple
process. He tries a demonstration. In an attempt to expose his own
mental process, he progresses through an assigned essay, paragraph by
paragraph, building from transition to transition. Finally, he collects
the main points and arrives at the author's conclusion. Then the teacher
pronounces himself ready to attempt a summary. He presents a terse
paragraph which inevitably contains familiar material from his previous
step-by-step analysis. The next essay is for the students to summarize.
Naturally, what results includes everything but a summary. A typical
yield includes a swarm of mere conclusions, unaccompanied by a basic
sketch of how those conclusions were reached; a bundle of disjunct
ideas which particularly dazzled the readers; a few 375-word summaries
of a 425-word essay; and a drift of personal opinions, such as "I suppose
this is a well-organized essay, but frankly I find it hard to get what
the guy is trying to say." Then follows a period of weeks during which
the teacher explains why none of these is a summary and offers up oc-
casional laudatory readings of the summaries of the few students who,
perhaps only by luck, fulfilled the assignment. But dawns have a way
of arriving. Finally, the teacher assigns Joseph Wood Krutch's "The
Shoddy Ethics of Alienation," and he receives:

In his essay "The Shoddy Ethics of Alienation" Joseph
Wood Krutch expresses his lack of sympathy with beatniks,
intellectuals, artists, and other fashionable people who
respond to social ills by proclaiming their alienation
from society and by broadcasting its decadence. Their
responses of destruction, dissipation, and complaint
only produce self-injury, futility, and sometimes even
comic contradiction. Even the serious people who are
concerned with social problems take an impossible approach
when they try to take on the improvement of society and
the human race as a whole. The betterment of society,
according to this essay, depends upon the improvement of
the individuals who compose it. We can improve society
best by embracing the concepts of personal integrity,
virtue, and honor.

The requirement of a summary with each reading assignment has the
tangential benefits of assuring that the assignments are read and of
providing another opportunity for practicing mechanics. But the desired
objective is that the student will understand, be able to talk about,
retain, and perceive a structure in what he reads.

The next step is to transfer this skill to student writing. There's
a convincing logic in the thought that if you can't think about what you
read, you can't think about what you write either. So a new assignment
seems reasonable: every time a student writes an essay, he must also
prepare a paragraph summary of what he has written. Of course, he is
applying to his own work the skills he has learned in reading the works
of others. The student concomitantly assesses his own work. If his
work is incoherent, fraught with irrelevancies, and devoid of a thesis,
he is going to have a hard time writing a summary. Undoubtedly, he will try. He will hand in a summary of the essay he wishes he had written or of the essay he thought he had written. He’ll try getting by with the mention of a few mainpoints or with a truncated conclusion or thesis statement. He may produce something that is, indeed, part of a summary. Or he may resort to the decry of an amusing, tacitly apologetic, anecdote of how his essay was executed under unique and inventive circumstances in the dorm last night. But, as in his eventual acquisition of summarizing skill in reading, he will progress through class discussion, explanation, and criticism, toward writing an essay that can be summarized. This brings us to the desideratum of all desideratum: through the use of summary in critical reading and writing, the student can learn to demand coherent thinking of himself before he writes instead of after (if only to complete the assignment).

University of Delaware

The Use of Poetry in Developing Language Skills in Freshman Composition

Philip Sean Brady

I began realizing, toward the seventh or eighth week of my first semester teaching Freshman Composition, that I was learning more about my students' personalities from their papers than from their participation in class. I was fascinated by their writing, especially when they wrote informally, or on a subject that impelled them to write passionately. And some of the students did write passionately, although their passion was evidenced more in the fury of their attack on the blank page than in the lucidity of their prose. I received the following note appended to a revised essay from one frustrated feminist.

Mr. Brady:

You said you were confused about whether the cause in this essay was women's lib or the vitality of the life force. I just want to say that woman's lib is the cause, and that it is a vital force.

I'm not sure if she meant that women's liberation is the cause in a cause and effect essay or in a life and death struggle. But either way this response is indicative of a problem faced by my entire class: their ideas were being misunderstood or ignored; and