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FIELD FRAGMENTATION AND NON-MAJOR LITERATURE COURSES

[Richard C. Gebhardt](#)

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Discussions of English department identity and mission more often center on the undergraduate major curriculum than on classes for general-studies and other non-major students. In such courses, though, we have an opportunity to touch the intellectual lives of far more people than we do in courses for majors. So, as I will argue here, English departments and their faculty should give more thought to classes and teaching for undergraduates who take a few literature courses and who do so for reasons quite different from those which motivate English majors.

My starting places will be two very different kinds of perspectives, one coming from influential voices within English and one from a celebrity outside our field. When Edward Said was President of the MLA, he wrote that we face “a new fragmentation, an often reckless abandonment of what could be a common intellectual pursuit in favor of highly specialized, exclusivist . . . approaches that destroy and undercut the historical as well as social bases of the humanities” (3). And James Berlin began his last book by observing that “English studies is in crisis. . . . [V]irtually no feature of the discipline can be considered beyond dispute [, not] the elements that constitute the categories of poetic and rhetoric [. . . nor] their relative place in graduate and undergraduate work” (xi). Comments like these sometimes appear in discussions of the intellectual and professional divisions of English, used to suggest a field-wide crisis of fragmentation or disintegration before a writer moves on toward some solution. I have both of these motives in mind as I write this essay exploring how fragmentation within our field limits the way English serves undergraduates who take a sampling of literature courses to meet general-

studies requirements.

One such general-studies literature student, professional golfer John Daly, evaluates his response to college literature courses this way:

I could care less about books and all that crap. I liked some of the classes some. I liked English. . . . History wasn't bad. But World Literature and all that crap? I could care less about what happened, all these fiction stories about what happened in the year 1500 or 1600. Half of 'em aren't even true. Who cares? Take a test on fiction? Something that ain't even true? It doesn't mean anything to me. (120)

Daly's point of view illustrates two related issues facing faculty who are concerned about undergraduate literature courses and the way we teach general students. The first is that many students don't like the literature courses they are required to take or the works they are required to read in those courses. The second issue is more subtle: students may have a fundamental lack of understanding about what literature is. Notice that Daly claims to have "liked English" more than some of his courses—though not fiction or world literature, which, presumably, he did not see as part of English.

Gerald Graff writes about both these issues in a 1995 essay. Acknowledging the "dislike many students harbor for literature," Graff notes that "[s]tudents often feel coerced and therefore turned off by the presumption that many teachers convey that "we all love literature, don't we—otherwise why should we be here?" (333) About the second point, Graff is less direct. He recounts a faculty friend's story about a student who asked why the class was reading *poetry* when it had been advertised as a course in *literature*. His friend, Graff comments, told the story as yet another sorry illustration of the abysmal ignorance of today's students, as if there had not been a time when he or any of us didn't know that poetry is a subclass of literature. To be fair, when I challenged him on the point, my friend acknowledged having recently noticed in a local bookstore that "poetry" and "literature" indeed occupied separate sections. . . . (325-26).

Graff touches here on something I will discuss later: faculty attitudes toward students. And his words illuminate John Daly's response to "literature and all that crap." Many undergraduates are compelled (by general education policies and other requirements) to take literature courses the focuses and purposes of which they only dimly understand. The first part of that sentence is obvious—don't we all tend to dislike things we are compelled to do? But the second part—lack of understanding—is more troubling, since American students in college literature courses have been studying literature in English classes for years. Here is how John Trimbur reflects on this conundrum:

[M]y students have very little idea why they've been asked over and over again in twelve years of schooling to take English and to read and study works of literature. Instead, they bring to class that first day a range of expectations both conventional and contradictory. Some, for example, think the class will be creative writing. Others expect to read some poems and short stories and give their personal responses or search for "hidden meanings." A number think we'll be studying grammar and punctuation. . . . They read the title [Introduction to Literature] . . . in a decidedly undifferentiated way that encompasses virtually everything they've been asked to do in the past in school under the auspices of "English." (16)

If students who have been "taking English" for a dozen years have so little clue about the nature of literature, is that their fault, as Graff's friend and many other faculty believe? Or does the fault lie with curriculum and instructional practices in an era in which (to echo Berlin) no feature of the discipline is beyond dispute and in

which (echoing Said) common intellectual pursuit has given way to mutually-exclusive specialized approaches? This second factor, it seems clear to me, is a large part of the problem. Jonathan Culler suggests as much near the start of a recent article: "I entitle my paper 'Imagining the Coherence of the English Major' because I suspect that many of us do not know" or no longer have a "sense of the unity of the subject [literature] and have to posit it by an act of imagination" (86). And John Trimbur is explicit that faculty "may not be altogether clear about what the study and teaching of 'English' is really all about" at a time when the role of English studies in transmitting an Arnoldian model of life . . . has increasingly been challenged not only by canon-busting critics, feminism, African-American studies, postcolonialism, and queer theory, but also by the performance principle and an achievement ideology of careerist individualism What had formerly been self-evident and self-justifying has now become problematic" (17).

Given the intellectual and professional climate of English departments, it is not surprising that many general students leave our courses unclear about what they are studying and why. For that climate—unsettled, disputed, specialist, careerist—seeps into the literature courses they take whenever teachers make a curricular or instructional decision: what texts to assign, the sequence in which to read them, issues to be stressed in writing assignments and discussions, points to encourage or to "correct" during discussion or in comments on student papers. Such choices, and many others, are influenced by the individual teacher's assumptions, priorities, and uncertainties about the field. So teachers make choices that center readings on canonical works, or examples of the traditional genres, or works by women, or African Americans, or residents of former British colonies. Some teachers orient assignments, discussions, and evaluation on mastery of concepts and facts, or on student responses, or on the way students use a preferred analysis—cultural, feminist, political, psychological. Some teachers organize courses that emphasize texts and readers, while others put intellectual context—political, social, theoretical—at the center of their courses. Some teachers develop courses to foster student growth because they believe that "study of literature can and should lead to . . . the making of a self" (Heller 21) and that literature classes can and should encourage "a continual conversation" about how literature is "a tool for the human mind" (Sargent 10). But (perhaps in pursuit of a similar goal) some faculty organize courses and teaching to frustrate and challenge students by maximizing "moments of blockage" when students discover "that the text frustrates facile apprehension and fails to deliver truths about experience" (Weller 41).

As the previous paragraph suggests, the diversity—even fragmentation—of our field means that undergraduate literature teaching is marked by broad *orientation differences* (text vs. context, for instance, or student growth vs. student challenge); by *content differences* (for instance, print vs. media, or canonical vs. culturally-diverse materials); and by *approach differences* (cultural, or aesthetic, or student response, or feminist, for instance). Overlaying and complicating those issues are *differences of faculty and student goals*, including matters of faculty professional identity and student enrollment motivation. For instance, scholarship (in the person's specialized niche) and writing for publication may dominate a faculty member's life to such a degree that the teacher gives little thought to the goals and motives of students who are not taking ten literature courses of increasing difficulty in preparation for graduate school and future faculty careers.

For English majors—taking many literature courses and selecting them with help from major guidelines and academic advisors—the variety of orientations, contents, and approaches is reasonable. For these students (especially ones who go on to graduate school and faculty careers) should know how diverse and chaotic this field is, and (we can hope, at least) they take enough courses and discuss their responses with enough faculty that they can begin to make some sense of it. Such students likely would benefit from taking courses from all the areas in this scheme of Jonathan Culler's for a coherent English major (an approach oversimplified by my excerpt):

- (1) In some courses [in the major] the main emphasis would be on techniques of close reading, the analysis of discursive conventions and literary and rhetorical techniques.
- (2) In others the focus would be historical: the study of a particular period of literature in its historical context
- (3) Elsewhere the emphasis would not fall on literature but on other cultural products and practices, as in courses that give central place to visual media or

popular culture. (4) Courses focused on the creation of value and the possibilities of knowledge [would be another option] . . . Here the stress falls on the ethical questions raised in literary works and by literature as a form of social action, as well as on the theoretical issues that arise in literary and cultural theory. (5) Finally, there is the practice of writing itself. (92, numbers added)

But how well would one or two courses plucked from a curriculum arranged this way serve students who are trying to satisfy general-studies requirements by selecting courses that do not conflict with their major classes and work schedules? How well, for that matter, would future high school English teachers be served by taking classes well-distributed over Culler's four types of literature courses, when they are called upon in future teaching (and before that by the National Teacher's Examination) to know a good deal about literary periods and representative canonical works?

General students who will not be availing themselves of the full complexity departments work to reflect in English-major literature offerings are likely to be ill-served by a few scattered courses, each representing a slice of that complexity. As such students take a first course, they come to see the how and why of reading literature in terms of a particular combination of differences—of orientation, content, and approach—embodied in the course (perhaps a context-oriented film course emphasizing feminist approaches and class discussion). If they take no other literature course, they will carry a very limited sense of literature with them as part of their general education. Students who take another course will not have such a narrow view, but may well be confused as they try to reconcile what they expect (a course like the previous one) when they later enroll in a text-centered short fiction course that emphasizes the development of thematic and technical tendencies in its weekly short writings.

As my broad-brush scenario no doubt makes clear, I believe we need to take such issues seriously. For much of the important work of English departments involves those many undergraduates who take a few scattered literature courses, who do so for different motives than majors have, and who, for both those reasons, need something different than the kind of courses which—taken in greater numbers, with appropriate sequencing and advisor guidance—help ground majors in the complexities and contradictions of literary study.

Doing better with—and for—this clientele will require serious discussion, in departments across the country, about questions like these: What do general-studies students need from literature courses? How can we try to provide what they need in classes for general-studies and other non-majors? Are there course focuses and teaching strategies that should not be used with general students even though they are quite appropriate with English majors? How might faculty who teach majors and general students in the same course develop different project options and teaching strategies for the different groups? What can we do, in general classes and major courses, to help future high-school English teachers prepare for their careers?

In trying to answer such questions, I believe, it would be useful to keep in mind the differences of orientation, content, and approach I sketched in paragraph eight, and particularly the differences in goals and motivations that can separate general students from majors, let alone from literature faculty. It also could be helpful to keep in mind a point George Levine made some years ago. One of the “functions of English departments that institutions and the culture as a whole endorse and pay for,” wrote Levine, may be one “to which . . . research faculty members are least committed”; this is “the teaching of literature as it is widely understood by those who don't make the study of it their profession” (44). Levine's statement relates to the very different goals and motivations of general students and teachers, a critical issue for discussions about non-major courses and teaching, even as it raises a different issue—public perception of what we do in English—that may provide additional motivation for the discussion. For Levine argued that the lack of attention to broad public expectations about literature teaching puts at risk “the future of English as a profession sustained by publicly and privately endowed institutions” (44).

One important focus of discussion about courses for general-studies students and other non-majors relates to

the fifth part of Culler's scheme for an English major—"the practice of writing itself"—and to his brief expansion on that part of the curriculum: "writing, we have tended to think, works best in courses with subject matter" (Culler 93). The subject matter of a given literature course results from specific decisions—some embedded in catalog descriptions, but many matters of instructor preference—about the orientation, content, and approach of that course. Making shifts in content, orientation, and approach in courses and teaching for general students will impact the subject matter students write about and, indeed, the writing we assign.

Most general students will not be well-served by the same assignments intended to help majors understand and use discourses of literary study during a several-year sequence of courses. For general students, personal growth in the spirit of Heller's and Sargent's earlier words may be a more appropriate goal than the development of critical or theoretical acumen, and writing assignments for them should aim at "helping students notice and articulate their perceptions, reactions, and responses to a text" (Elbow 196). These aims reflect both *response* approaches harking back to Louise Rosenblatt and *writing-to-learn* approaches from WAC.

Both of these are well-established teaching practices, of course, with extensive bibliographies from which faculty can draw during course planning. [\[1\]](#) My suggestion to use reader response and writing to learn is a deliberately general recommendation—a direction pointer for faculty working to adjust courses and assignments or discussing how non-majors might best be served in a department's literature courses. But I will try to offer more specific ideas and observations in the rest of this article.

Explicitly blending student-response and writing-to-learn approaches is my primary instructional goal in ENG 150 "Response to Literature" (see the [Appendix](#) for some highlights). The point of this course is not to introduce students to response as a way to study and write about literature, as might be the case in an early course for majors (perhaps one using a book like Steven Lynn's *Texts and Contexts*, which presents Reader-Response Criticism and five other critical approaches as ways for students to understand and write about literature). Rather, ENG 150 seeks to put writing into the service of response as a way to involve students with course readings and—the reason for the Reading Log and Web Reading activities in the second section of the [Appendix](#)—things they will be reading, literature or not, in years to come.

The response focus of ENG 150 is evident in the "Course Orientation" section of the syllabus, with the writing-to-learn focus showing in the "Activities and Assignments" section. The *blending* of the two approaches shows most clearly in some two dozen WTL Assignments (a sampling appears in the [Appendix](#)) keyed to reading assignments and playing a major role in the course grade.

Typically, these writing prompts, WTL #3 and WTL #9, for instance, direct students to an assigned text—and sometimes to reading strategies, like read quickly and then re-read—and ask students to refer to themselves as well as the text in their writing. As WTL #6 suggests, prompts sometimes build on each other so that students use ideas from earlier reading and writing as they respond to new works and, in the process, find connections between texts. Some prompts emphasize broad literary terms from earlier class discussion as a context for response, for instance "character" in WTL #9 and "conflict" in WTL #17. Some prompts, WTL #13 for example, context response with important and/or difficult passages, and others, such as WTL #20, ask, more generally, that students look for textual signals about possible themes.

I do not offer ENG 150 or its WTL Assignments as models to follow in teaching general students (even if you happen to teach a course whose title and catalog description feature student response), but to clarify a teaching approach which can help address issues raised earlier in this article. The course and its writing-to-learn assignments are *centered on* student response and help students become more detailed in and confident about their responses. This is something, I think, of real long-term value for students who will be reading for recreation (we hope!) rather than "studying" or "teaching" texts professionally after they graduate. Since response-centered writing draws on students' personal experiences, cultural and educational backgrounds, prior reading experiences, etc., a person in her one-and-only literature class and an English major taking her fourth course can both respond—differently, no doubt—and they can learn from discussions involving their responses. And response approaches can be used (in early assignments, for instance, or a recurring series of notebook or blog

entries) in courses of widely different content and/or approach. This can give general students a place to connect to a course with unfamiliar content and/or approach and a way to build, in a second general studies course, on reading and writing strategies fostered in an earlier course.

For such reasons, a writing-intensive response emphasis (in assignments or units, if not whole courses) is a good approach to take with our general students. But I know that there are other good approaches as well. So as I started working on this final section of the article, I talked with several department colleagues—Phil Dickinson, Erin Labbie, and Tom Wymer—who teach general students as well as English majors in their courses in American, British, and World Literature. I was looking for ideas and teaching strategies that could serve as additional direction pointers for faculty interested in adjusting courses for their general students. And I will end this article with six teaching principles based on ideas and course materials my colleagues kindly shared with me for this purpose.

1. *Make room for student reaction and opinion even if assignments are not explicitly response-centered.* This simple strategy is clear in the weekly Reading Response Papers in Phil Dickinson's special-topics course, ENG 300 "Terrorism and the Media." These are one-to-two page weekly writings focused on course assignments. The syllabus tells students that these are places "to demonstrate your comprehension and understanding of the text in question" and that the teacher will read them "for evidence of thoughtfulness, originality, persuasiveness and clarity/coherence in your thinking and writing." But note the italicized words in this excerpt from the syllabus: You "may wish to describe the central idea(s) of the text (paraphrased in *your own words* . . .); you may also apply the ideas by *exploring their relationship to your own circumstances*. . .[by] *disagreeing/agreeing with the author*, or [by] illustrating how the author's arguments compare with [or] disagree/agree with those of other authors in our texts" (emphasis added).

2. *Maximize discussion by finding non-lecture ways to provide the background material students need.* This teaching strategy has in mind general students (and others) who may be happy to assume a passive role while a teacher fills large chunks of class time with background lectures. Moving at least some backgrounding outside of class shifts responsibility to students and allows more time for active class discussion. For example, in ENG 261, "Masterpieces of World Literature to 1400," Tom Wymer puts all his lectures and other background materials into BlackBoard (nearly 30 documents, ranging from 72 Kb to 1.8 Mb depending on the art and architectural photos included) in order to save class time for discussion of literary works. As his syllabus puts it, the "class will be partially web-based in that I will post lectures under Course Documents on the BlackBoard website for the course. As a result *we should be able to devote class time almost entirely to discussion*" (emphasis added).

3. *Use writing as a way to prepare for productive class discussion* . As an example, Tom Wymer's ENG 261 course includes a "Notebook/Journal" as a 25% grading component. Sometimes entries grow from questions at the end of BlackBoard lectures, and sometimes students are to pick their own topics. In either case, Wymer's syllabus encourages active involvement with a text: "Concentrate on some aspect of the reading you find especially interesting or important. The basis of that interest may be personal, historical, literary, philosophical, theological, or whatever Your response may include questions you can answer, ones you cannot, as well as ones you would like to speculate about." The assignment also encourages students to be "willing to *test your responses by raising questions in class you have explored in your journal*" (emphasis added).

4. *Use the web to promote writing and extend discussion beyond class meetings.* Here, for instance, is Phil Dickinson's requirement for BlackBoard postings and/or responses in ENG 300: Each week, his syllabus says,

students should make “one thoughtful posting . . . about a topic, issue, or question we've been talking about, or an event or outside source, that pertains to the class. Your posts may consist of questions, responses to others, thoughts, . . . or ideas for [future] essay topics.” The very openness of an assignment like this invites responses from general students and English majors alike, and it lets teachers appraise the substance of comments (whether or not they are contexted by lots of work in literature).

5. *In assigning major papers, give students multiple options and keep a range of students in mind as you develop those options.* In ENG 264, “British Literature to 1700,” for instance, Erin Labbie invites students to write papers on any of eight varied topics—Translations of *Beowulf*, Nationalism/Post-Coloniality, Censorship, Courtly Love, Personification/Animality, Sovereignty, Economics and Poetics, and Mysticism—each topic described in 60-150 words on a project assignment sheet. The wide range of topics increases the chance that students will find something of interest to write about, and the directions invite students to propose alternative topics, too. As Labbie explained in an email message, she wants to offer a “variety of questions . . . that show relevance to and relationships with broader contemporary problems that are important to all students, regardless of their disciplinary focus and major interest.” Labbie knows that her class enrolls general students as well as English majors, and she says that “it is important to provide assignments that interest non-majors and which inspire them to accomplish the skills that are expected of both groups of students.” Each of the first three paper options has a note that the “topic is often chosen by future high school teachers”—a useful hint that Labbie includes because she sees these topics helping future teachers “imagine teaching a text or making choices about canon inclusion and syllabus design.”

6. *In assigning writing, be specific about your expectations for content and approach.* The Dickinson and Wymer excerpts in principles 1 and 3 show this strategy at work with short weekly papers and journals—regular, low-pressure writing through which students develop ideas and responses by writing about them. Clear directions about such writing are especially important for general students who may be unfamiliar with key aspects of your assignment, and this is even more the case with major course papers. Aware of this, Erin Labbie's ENG 264 paper topics sheet (in principle 5) alerts students that all eight questions ask “you to analyze rather than describe the texts,” and to “consider specific elements of the texts.” Then it sketches an approach for the 6-8 page paper she expects: “Your intro should be a single paragraph and your thesis should be in the first paragraph (generally at the end). You should then have at least three (no more than five) significant points that are supported with textual evidence, and which you spend approximately 2-4 paragraphs explaining. Your conclusion should summarize your points and perhaps ask some questions that your argument guides us to consider. You may use outside sources” Phil Dickinson briefly discusses course papers in the ENG 300 syllabus, distributes a Writing Reminders handout, and explains each course paper with a separate sheet which describes the focus of the paper (a comparison of ideas in two books in one paper, an argument about the thesis of a book in the other), suggests reading/research approaches, discusses audience, and gives some drafting suggestions.

The six teaching principles I see in the practices of Bowling Green colleagues Tom Wymer, Erin Labbie, and Phil Dickinson reflect, I believe, a common interest in *students* as well as in the subject matter of courses. Such concern leads good teachers to think of teaching strategies likely to work with a variety of students and to tinker with their approaches over time so that they become more effective. Who *are* the students in my class? What kinds of assignments and activities will serve them well? Those are important questions, especially when courses required for the English major also are taken by other students. Trying to answer those questions for oneself—or with other interested teachers—may be the most important thing faculty members can do to serve the general students in their classes.

Appendix: ENG 150: Response to Literature

“Course Orientation” [Excerpted from the Syllabus]

Our section of ENG 150 will try to live up to the course title—"Response to Literature"—and to the catalog description that says that the course is "based on student responses to readings." I'll have more information about the response approach of our course as the semester progresses. For now, let me just quote an important book on literature and its teaching:

Through the medium of words, *the text brings into the reader's consciousness certain concepts, certain sensuous experiences, certain images of things, people, actions, scenes* . The special meanings and, more particularly, the submerged associations that these words and images have for the individual reader will largely determine what the work communicates to him. *The reader brings to the work personality traits, memories of past events, present needs and preoccupations, a particular mood of the moment, and a particular physical condition* . These and many other elements . . . determine his response to . . . the text. (Louise Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, italics added)

Some ENG 150 Course Activities and Assignments

Writing-to-Learn Assignments. Over the semester, you will work with about 25 WTL Assignments intended to let you develop your responses to course readings, and to help you expand the range of your responses and increase the confidence you have in your responses. That sounds like a lot of writing, I know. But this work counts for 40% of the course grade and replaces quizzes and most tests. You should bring WTLs to class to facilitate discussion, and keep the assignments (clearly numbered, dated, and titled) in your Portfolio.

Electronic Publication. Between weeks 10 and 13, revise what you consider a strong WTL assignment into an informal essay and share it with your classmates and me in the BlackBoard forum. When you are revising, keep in mind that you need to be clear for “unfamiliar” readers—people who don't know the material or your responses the way you do. Return to the forum to respond to postings by others—and to read replies to your work.

Reading Log. During weeks 2 through 8, keep a running record of your reading in these three categories: (a) Personal or entertainment reading (books, magazines, etc.); (b) Web Reading connected with this class and with your personal or entertainment reading; (c) Background or extra reading connected to other courses (not required assignments).

Web Reading. Spend a half hour each week browsing in web sites that focus on new books, book reviews, information about authors, discussions of literary trends, etc. Keep a list of URLs and brief descriptions of web sites you would recommend to others in the class.

Working Groups. Periodically, there will be small-group discussions about readings or assignments, and there will be some panel-type sessions in which a group presents information and leads class discussion. Panel-led discussion will be part of the Final Examination in this course.

Some of the 25 Writing-To-Learn Assignments From ENG 150

WTL #3 — Gary Soto's “The Rhino”

(a) Read the piece quickly.

(b) *Jot down* a sentence or two about how you respond to the piece overall. Mention *specifics* from the text and specifics from your biography, values, education, etc.

(c) Read “The Rhino” a second time—slowly, marking words or lines that seem important.

(d) *Jot* a sentence about something new that struck you on the second reading.

(e) *Sketch out* —at least one full sentence each—three different responses you now have to the text. (Include specifics from the text and from your life, values, etc.)

WTL #6 — Three Texts, Together

Read quickly through these two texts: Sandra Cisneros's “The House on Mango Street” and Frank O'Connor's “My Oedipus Complex.” As you read, let yourself be drawn to

1. Possible connections (similarities or differences) to “The Rhino” and

2. Things that trigger your memories of your own earlier experiences.

(a) Write several sentences about a point you could make in class about #1;

(b) Sketch some things you draw from #2, and

(c) Do one of these two things (or both if you like):

Jot some questions you could ask other students to draw out their responses.

Write some notes you could use if called on to “teach” a 3 minute mini lesson relating to the three texts.

WTL #9 — Characters in *The Death of Ivan Illych* (Chapter 1)

(a) Read Chapter 1 of Tolstoy's short novel (about 6 pages in our textbook).

(b) Jot down how you respond to the character Peter Ivanovich. Using full sentences :

First indicate something the character says or does that causes you to respond.

Then indicate how you responded to this character.

Finally, indicate something in your background or value system that influenced the response.

(c) Read the chapter again.

(d) Jot down how you respond to Ivan Illych's widow. Using full sentences :

First indicate something the character says or does that causes you to respond.

Then indicate how you responded to this character.

Finally, indicate something in your background or value system that influenced the response.

WTL #13 — A Passage in *The Death of Ivan Illych*

Re-read Chapter 9 (pp 977-979) quickly for overall orientation.

- (a) Slowly read lines 290-313 looking for sentences or phrases to which you have a reaction (intellectual, moral, religious, biographical, etc.). Jot some notes that will help with part c.
- (b) Reread this section marking several sentences or phrases to which you have a strong response (intellectual, moral, religious, biographical, etc.).
- (c) Copy out two of the passages you marked in b and mark the one to which you now feel the greater response. About this one passage write a couple sentences about how you respond to it; then write a couple sentences about what in the words themselves led to your response; then write a few sentences about what in you (your personal experiences, upbringing, value system, etc.) caused the response.

WTL #17 — *A Doll's House* (#1)

- (a) Start reading Act I, stopping to think about places that connect to these points:

Nora's Character , Helmer's Character , and the Conflict the play seems to center on.

- (b) At whatever point you finish Act 1, write a couple paragraphs in which you PREDICT what is going to happen later in the play. Be sure you talk about each of the three underlined points above and that you use specifics (and page numbers) from the play.

WTL #20 — *A Doll's House* (#4)

Skim through *A Doll's House* looking for speeches, actions, and stage directions that imply (or maybe say) things about the nature of men and women and about relationships between women and men. It would be good to have two lists—one on Nature, one on Relationships.

- (a) When you find a statement, jot down a note (with page number). Have enough detail (what's going on, who's speaking to whom, etc.) so your note is clear. Be sure you note more than just a few statements and that they are scattered through the whole play.
- (b) Then jot down a sentence of your response to the statement.
- (c) Pick out one of your responses and develop an exploration and explanation of around 250 words: what causes you to have this response (biography and experience, values, education, cultural factors—all those things that influence how and why we respond to what we read).

Note:

Here are a few sources that may prove helpful. Publishing information is included in the Works Cited list.

Writing to Learn and WAC Generally: John Bean, *Engaging Ideas: The Professor's Guide to Integrating Writing, Critical Thinking, and Active Learning in the Classroom*; Toby Fulwiler, "Writing and Learning American Literature"; Katherine Gottschalk and Keith Hjortshoj, "Links Between Writing, Reading, Discussion, and Oral Presentation," chapter 8 of *The Elements of Teaching Writing* (121-144); Kate Kiefer, "Integrate Writing Into Any Course"; Art Young and Toby Fulwiler, *When Writing Teachers Teach Literature* . The *WAC Clearinghouse* (<http://wac.colostate.edu>) is a resource-rich site on writing to learn and writing across the curriculum generally.

Response-Centered Literature Teaching: Richard Beach, *A Teacher's Introduction to Reader-Response*

Theories; Allan Carey-Webb, *Literature and Lives: A Response-Based, Cultural Studies Approach to Teaching English* (the table of contents and chapter 3 "Genderizing the Curriculum" are available at <http://www.ncte.org/store/books/literature/106276.htm?source=gs>); Steven Lynn "Creating the Text: Reader-Response Criticism," chapter 4 of *Texts and Contexts* (55-89); James Squire, "Toward a Response-Oriented Curriculum in Literature," and Lois P. Tucker "Liberating Students through Reader-Response Pedagogy in the Introductory Literature Course." Kathleen Blake Yancey, *Teaching Literature as Reflective Practice*, deals with general studies literature teaching (for the table of contents and chapter 1 "Context, Vocabulary, Curriculum" see <http://www.ncte.org/store/books/literature/106390.htm?source=gs>). "Writing for Personal Knowledge," Part IV of Young and Fulwiler's *When Writing Teachers Teach Literature*, emphasizes response in essays like Peter Elbow's "Breathing Life into the Text" (195-205) and Carl Lovitt's "Using Journals to Define Public and Private Domains" (230-244).

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Richard C. Gebhardt (richgeb@bgnet.bgsu.edu) is professor of English at Bowling Green State University where he has served as Chair and now directs the Rhetoric & Writing PhD Program (<http://www.bgsu.edu/departments/english/rcweb/index.html>). Before moving to BGSU, Rick was a faculty member, Humanities Division Chair, and Assistant Dean at Findlay College, and he served as President of the College English Association of Ohio. Rick's articles have appeared in *Hemingway Review*, *Perspectives on Contemporary Literature*, *College English*, *CEA Forum*, *ADE Bulletin*, and other journals.

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