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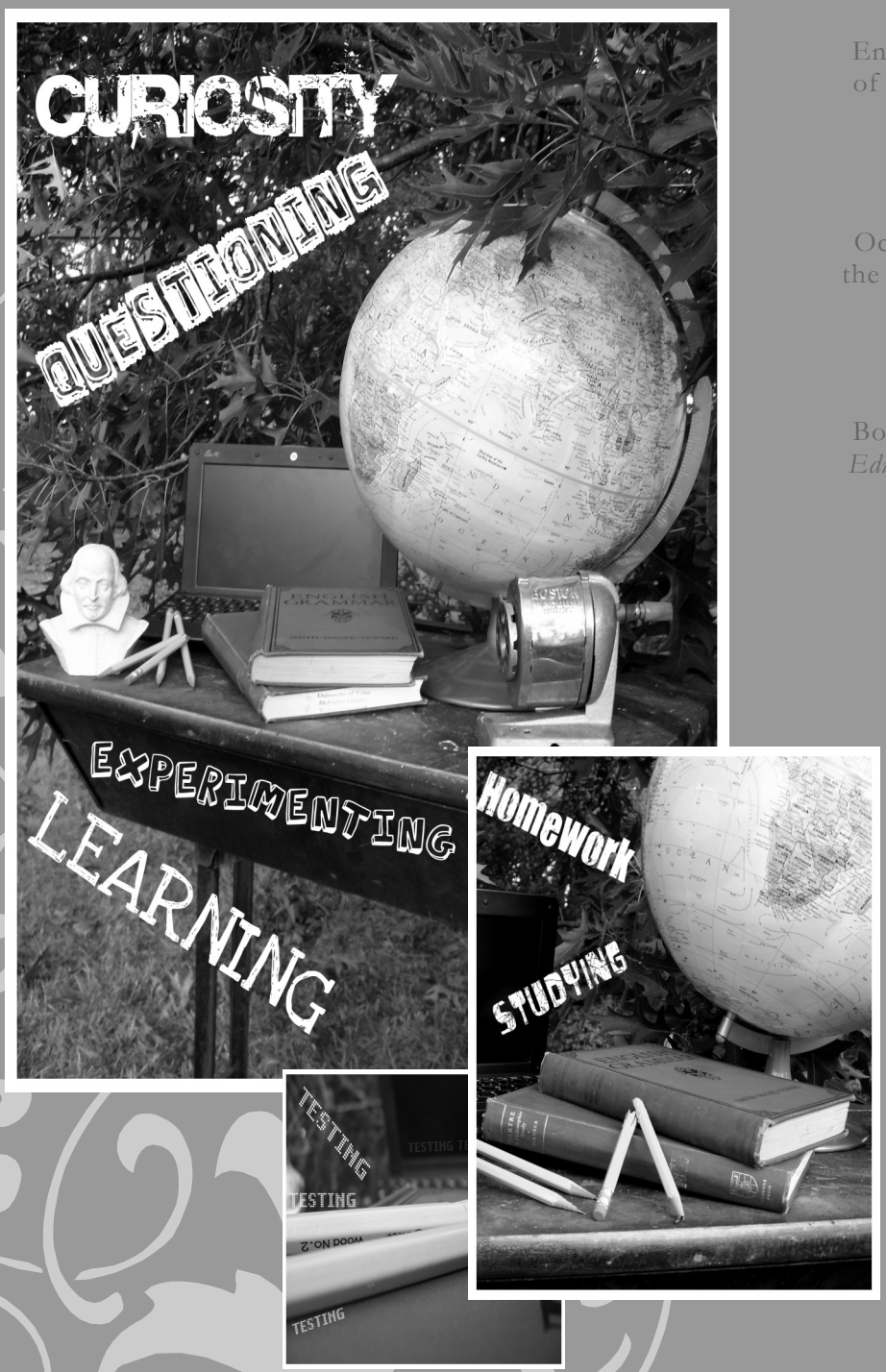

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Fall 2011	August 1, 2011	October 31, 2011
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The *Oklahoma English Journal,* the official publication of the **Oklahoma Council of Teachers of English**, publishes articles of interest to English teachers and language arts instructors, regardless of teaching level.

- **Articles** should be theoretically based yet pedagogically applicable at a variety of levels, dealing with the teaching of writing, reading, or literature—generally or specifically—and should anticipate the needs of teachers at all classroom levels, elementary through college. Articles, including references and appendices, should be kept under 12 pages, although longer articles may be published when justified by substance and likely reader interest.
- **Book reviews** will be limited to books of likely professional interest to English teachers. Starting Fall 2008, a section dedicated to Young Adult Literature will begin.
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Dr. Teresa Rothrock
Oklahoma English Journal
Department of English and Languages
East Central University
1100 E. 14th Street
Ada, OK 74820-6999

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Ends and Means: Implications of Peace Literacy in Oklahoma Writing Classrooms

by Ronald Clark Brooks

In We Make the Road by Walking, Myles Horton tells a story about working with union organizers in the midst of a heated strike. Facing opposition from local and state police forces and losing solidarity within their own ranks, they held an emergency meeting in a hotel room. "They kept throwing out ideas," Myles reports, "and I'd raise questions to get them to think a little more about it." One of the organizers tries to get Myles to tell them what he thinks they should do, but Myles refuses. "In the first place," he says, "I don't know what to do, and if I did know what to do I wouldn't tell you, because if I had to tell you today then I'd have to tell you tomorrow, and when I'm gone you'd have to get somebody else to tell you." So one of the guys pulls a gun out of his pocket and says "Goddamn you, if you don't tell us I'm going to kill you." Myles reports that at this point he was "tempted then to become an expert, right on the spot!" (Horton and Freire 126).

For any of us who have ever tried to enact problem-posing education in our classrooms—that is, for those of us who have tried to move students beyond relying directly on us as authorities—this anecdote, though extreme, will feel familiar. Students in our writing classes often want us to tell them the right way to do something, rather than work through the complexities of our course content or the complexities of the writing process, but this anecdote has deeper implications for those of us who are interested in the literacy of peace. On the one hand, there is the highly charged political content of Horton's "classroom." Horton is trying to bring about real and measurable social change. On the other, there is a pedagogical method employed that is based on a principled ideal: that students must learn by being in dialog with equals, not by being imposed upon by an outside authority.

Students in our writing classes often want us to tell them the right way to do something, rather than work through the complexities of our course content or the complexities of the writing process.

Horton's anecdote has a great deal to teach us about what peace literacy means, both as a practice and as an end in itself. In order to speculate more deeply on the relationship between these means and ends, however, I would like to ground his anecdote within the broader conversations about critical literacy and rhetorical studies in order to speculate more specifically on how a literacy of peace can be practiced in our Oklahoma classrooms.

Kenneth Burke: Ad Bellum Purificandum

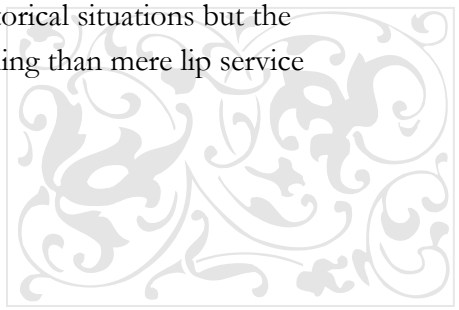
Kenneth Burke's rhetorical theories relate directly to peace literacy, not for the reasons that he is often introduced to our students (he is the father of modern rhetoric, the inventor of the pentad, who extended Aristotle's idea of persuasion to include identification), but because of his awareness of the power of language. Burke claims:

> The hierarchic principle is not complete in the social realm, for instance, in the mere arrangement whereby each rank is overlord to its underlings and underling to its overlords. It is complete only when each rank accepts the principle of gradation itself, and in thus "universalizing" the principle, makes a spiritual reversal of the ranks just as meaningful as their actual material arrangement. (A Rhetoric of Motive 138)

Our classrooms are based around a principle of hierarchy: school system to administrators; administrators to teachers; teachers to students; students to students who are often in competition with one another. These principles are universalized by all the participants in the system.

Burke often addressed the role that language plays in helping the participants of a social system universalize these hierarchical principles. As language teachers, then, we cannot simply assume that by giving our students literacy that we will be bringing about a better world. We have to reflect on what type of literacy we are giving our students and how we are bringing them to knowledge of their reading and writing situation. Like many rhetoricians, Burke wanted to "expose language as a deceptive, powerful tool that masquerades as 'truth', thus engendering entire ethical systems" (Hawhee 132), but beyond that he wanted to use language to force new perspectives and orientations. An underlying assumption of critical literacy is that as teachers we ourselves must be shrewd about the way that language and power interact with one another, and understand that our subject positions in the classroom give us power; and that power can lead us to short-circuit the very principles that peace literacy proposes.

In Permanence and Change, Burke proposes that we "adopt incongruous perspectives for the dwarfing of our impatience" (272) because "ideological change is often frustratingly slow, and peaceful means require respect for the opinions of others and continual adjustment of our discourse to sensibilities not our own" (Crusius 95). At the heart of this process for teachers is being open to the students in our classroom and their sensibilities. Teachers who wish to enact peace rhetoric in their classrooms must understand not only their own historical situations but the situations of their students as well. More must come from this understanding than mere lip service to diversity in the classroom.



Woodson begins his landmark book, The Miseducation of the Negro, by noting that "'educated Negroes' have an attitude of contempt toward their own people because in their own as well as in their mixed schools Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African" (1). Aware that African-American subjects were marginalized by their education, he argued that the end result of this education was to make them extremely good at criticizing ideas, but not at providing a constructive vision for their own people (Woodson 1-6). This served to divorce educated African-Americans from their own people not only in the educational sphere, but also in the economic, political, geographical, and religious ones.

For Woodson, understanding history is essential to opening the process of education to a state of revision. Woodson wants African-American students to understand not only what has been done to them historically, but also the power in their own African history. He wants them to understand, for example, how the black dialect is not a perversion of English, but is instead "a broken down African tongue" which has been "linguistically polluted by English" (qtd in Kates 111). As Susan Kates points out,

> Woodson articulates a need to approach the study of speaking and writing from a rhetorical point of view. That is to say, he observes the importance of study that goes beyond simply learning how to express oneself—a study that examines the history of rhetoric and the evolution of particular modes of communication and their ideological consequences. (110-111)

"Each race," Woodson argues, "has certain gifts which the others do not possess. It is by the development of these gifts that every race must justify its right to exist" (8). Woodson's implicit argument is that the African American race had to work much harder to justify its right to exist because of material conditions and racist ideology, an argument which has tremendous implication for those of us who want to apply a literacy of peace to our classrooms. What Woodson's theory teaches us is that what may give one student a new and liberating perspective may further marginalize another student. Woodson's solution to this problem is simple. Woodson suggests that "if the Negro is to be forced to live in the ghetto he can more easily develop out of it under his own leadership than under that which is super-imposed" (28).

Like Burke's, Woodson's final interpretive frame is superstructural and hopeful, but in many ways Woodson's final frame may be more so because Woodson is finally more explicit about the ends that he hopes to achieve. Woodson calls for programs of education that are self-generated and tied directly to the concerns of the African American community. In his work, he creates a space where indoctrinated education can be forgotten and relearned, so that the educated members of his race would finally be able to "fall in love with [their] own people and begin to

sacrifice for their uplift" (Woodson 44).

Woodson's superstructural frame, however, presents many problems for those of us in educational circles. Despite the theoretical progress that more radical academics have made, the structure in which we work is still one of miseducation because many of its primary assumptions about the nature of education rely on objective theories of knowledge. This is even more complicated for academics that come from backgrounds of privilege in terms of race, class, and gender. There is no easy solution to this complication, but the educational vision of Jane Addams provides some direction.

Like Woodson, Addams developed an awareness of the importance of difference in education. In Democracy and Social Ethics, she warns the would-be educator against superimposed leadership. She particularly warns charity workers against having assumptions about the lower class populations they believe they can help. Addams is acutely aware that different classes share different warrants, the misunderstanding of which can damage educational goals. Tying these different assumptions to "diversity of experience," (18) Addams argues that diversity of experience can "challenge the safest platitude of any member of the upper class" (18). For instance, the philanthropist may "refer quite naturally to the 'horrors of the saloon.' And discover that the head of her visited family does not connect them with 'horrors' at all" (18). Instead,

Addams developed an awareness of the importance of difference in education.

> he remembers all the kindnesses he has received there, the free lunch and treating which goes on, even when a man is out of work and not able to pay up; the loan of five dollars he got there when the charity visitor was miles away and he was threatened with eviction. He may listen politely to her reference to 'horrors,' but considers it only 'temperance talk.' (19)

Not only does misunderstanding get in the way of education, it reinforces the class differences that the educator presumably attempts to work against. The solution to this problem lies in another anecdote. At Hull House, some educators took fifty working class children to "Lincoln Park, only to be grieved by their apathetic interest in trees and flowers" (Addams 27). But once a police wagon rode past, the workers were surprised "to find them galvanized into sudden life" (27). While traditional educational theorists would blame the children for being interested in "baser things" and devise strategies for getting children interested in trees and flowers, Addams directs her satire at the educators, who ignore the diversity of experience of the children (and the educational opportunities therein) who immediately "began to tell experiences of arrests which [their] baby eyes had witnessed" (27).

Indeed, what Addams is explicitly aware of is the requirement that educators "free the powers of each man and connect him with the rest of life" (80). Addams is aware that the powers of this freedom reside in experience, and the reasoning behind this awareness moves her clearly into the realm of peace literacy. "We ask this not merely because it is the man's right to be thus connected, but because we have become convinced that the social order cannot afford to get along without his special contribution" (80). Throughout Democracy and Social Ethics, Addams argues that the educational experience of the working class must be brought into the school, not the other way around. This concept is fundamental to a literacy of peace because it attempts to abolish the hierarchy that Burke claims we must be shrewd about in order to bring about true social change. Addams and Woodson allow us to interrogate more fully the relationship of class, race and gender, particularly as it ties to both the subject positions of our students and our own subject positions as teachers.

Freire: Problem Posing Education

Freire's educational method points out some additional possibilities for a literacy of peace. Most importantly, Freire's optimism about the ability of the oppressed to work with the oppressor to change society allows those of us in educational circles to conceptualize ways of constructing classrooms that have libratory potential. Like Burke, Addams, and Woodson, Freire is concerned about the ways that education becomes the means through which oppressive class structures are maintained. Freire notes that he has seen many generative themes silenced by the imposition of a teacher's authority in the classroom. This happens because the oppressed have internalized a banking concept of education, where the teacher simply imparts knowledge into the minds of his or her students. Freire argues that we must shift toward a problem-posing education, but that the problems must emerge from the students themselves—otherwise students are merely relying on the authority of the teacher. This is why any program of education must start "with the conviction that it cannot present it own program but must search for this program dialogically with the people" (Freire 124). Dialog leads to praxis, which he defines as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (51) on the part of all people.

The motivation for the oppressor to participate in the liberation of the oppressed comes from the realization that while education dehumanizes the oppressed, it also dehumanizes the oppressor, though in a different way. This dehumanization is a "distortion of the vocation of being more fully human" (Freire 44). Like Addams, Freire seeks "a pedagogy which must be forged with, not for, the oppressed," (48) and also like Addams he is not afraid to address the paradox that this goal presents: "how can the op-

"Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is on e of violence."

~ Freirean aphorism

pressed, as divided, unauthentic humans, participate in developing the pedagogy of liberation" (48). For Freire, the oppressed learn to articulate their own oppression and find solutions to it. This is a means to greater peace, but it does not necessary mean the absence of conflict. In fact, teachers who attempt to help their students articulate the forms of oppression with which they are involved can most likely expect to see resistance. Oklahoma students, who have been embroiled in many forms of objective testing, will certainly resist, that is until they become excited about the process of finding their own answers to their own problems through the process of inquiry.

Horton: The Limits of Institutional Freedom

The point of Horton's anecdote was that as teachers we should stay true to our ideals even under the most extreme conditions. Fortunately, I have never experienced resistance as intense as the union worker's who resisted Horton's problem posing approach, but I have seen students resist problem-posing education in Oklahoma classroom. In these cases, I bring my students back to an aphorism by Freire: "Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence" (85), and I have always believed that this aphorism applies to students who come from the farms, suburbs, or cities of Oklahoma as much as it applies to peasants in Brazil. Horton's and Freire's We Make the Road by Walking solidifies this relevance. In fact, "one of the reasons that Paulo Freire wanted to 'talk a book' with Miles Horton, he often said, was that he was tired of North American audiences telling him that his ideas were only applicable to Third World conditions" (Horton and Freire 2). While Freire conceptualized a problem-posing theory of education, Horton had simply intuited one by talking with people who were in need. Realizing that existing educational systems were not meeting the needs of marginalized people, Horton learned that the best response was to turn those people into teachers themselves, drawing on their experiences to help them teach themselves.

This approach is connected to peace because the means are inextricably bound up with the ends. While Addams believed the role of education was to free the powers of human beings and connect them with the rest of life, Horton believed that "one of the tasks of the educator is also to provoke the discovering of need for knowing and never to impose the knowledge whose need was not yet perceived" (Horton and Freire 66). This perception allowed Horton to keep peace and social justice as his final end, but not to force his vision of peace and social justice on people in need. Nevertheless, the Highlander School explicitly tried to "remind people that they are part of the world and they have responsibilities and opportunities to do things outside their own communities" (Horton and Freire 67). Horton explicitly speaks out against educational practices that focus solely on the individual. He describes those as dead-ends, ones that end exactly where they start (Horton and Freire 179). But nevertheless, he was aware that education has to start with a "concrete piece of people's reality" (Horton and Freire 97). What ties this paradox together for

Horton is his belief that "there is no such thing as individual rights, that they have to be universal rights" (Horton and Freire 105). The only way that individuals can obtain rights for themselves is by working for them for everyone.

While Horton gives us an ideal that we as teachers (and individuals) can look toward, we have to realize that Horton took the admirable but unusually courageous step of recreating an educational structure outside of the dominant paradigm. So this raises the question, what should we do in Oklahoma? Several hints are given in We Make the Road by Walking. Horton suggests that teachers should "test out how far they can push [institutional] limits and do it in a quiet sort of way, kind of a pilot project to see how far they can go" (Horton and Freire 143). Horton suggests that "most people will find out they can go much further in an institution that is big and bureaucratic and depends primarily on reports and grades" (143).

Of course, there are limits that get imposed by the students themselves, especially if the students discern that the teacher is new to teaching, or is young. Students in these cases often interpret problem-posing methods as direct results of inexperience. Freire argues that "in such a case, the teacher, understanding the situation, should be 50 percent a traditional teacher and 50 percent a democratic teacher in order to begin to challenge the students, and for them to change a little bit too" (160). This openness to slow change is also essential to a literacy of peace. Both teachers and students have to be allowed to work within and push against the social and institutional constraints at a level they can live with (not necessarily always at a level of comfort, but never at a level of discomfort that is imposed upon from without).

...practicing a literacy of peace is not an easy task. The only way for this end to be achieved is through peaceful means and by insisting on never committing the violent act of "alienating human beings from their own decision-making"…

This final requirement for peace literacy—that its practitioners acknowledge the limits imposed upon us by institutions—may be the most important one. It is difficult enough to imagine a classroom that is based on dismantling hierarchies in the classroom. Our investigation has proved that practicing a literacy of peace is not an easy task. The only way for this end to be achieved is through peaceful means and by insisting on never committing the violent act of "alienating human beings from their own decision-making" —which is, according to Freire, to "change them into objects" (86). We can only enact a literacy of peace in our classrooms by moving with our students dialogically toward knowledge and change. In actuality, students may finally only move forward in this realm through identification. As we move through the process of finding peace by working for the rights of others, our students may do so as well.

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Dr. Ronald Clark Brooks is an Assistant Professor of English and Associate Director of First-Year Composition at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, Oklahoma.

Occasionally, a Comma Can Be the Difference Between Life and Death: A Book Review

by Josh Forrester

Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2003. 240 pp. $12.00, paper. ISBN-13: 978-1592402038.

Part historical discourse, part lecture, part fanatical rant, Lynne Truss's *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is an entertaining, albeit, at times, tedious and annoying, sermon on the condition of today's punctuation. And when I say sermon, I am nearly serious, as this book is more of a rallying cry for all grammar sticklers (i.e., Grammar Nazis), than it is anything else. It is the voice in the desert of "Weblish" and "Netspeak" crying, "Prepare ye the day of incomprehensible syntax!" Though it reads like an apocalyptic text, many of the points she makes on the endangerment of language comprehension are not at all unreasonable. The way that text-messaging, social-networking, instant-messaging, and email have changed the way we read, write, and understand the English language (mostly at the detriment of proper spelling and punctuation) is absolutely something that needs to be discussed. What do we do about the seemingly overwhelming amount of people who don't know the difference between a comma and their big toe? Is there anything to be done for those who seem to have the spelling prowess of a horse? Though not many solutions are to be found in Truss's book (that is, unless one considers donning a blue pen in order to vandalize misspelled greengrocers' signs a solution), many of her arguments for proper punctuation are quite strong, and really those are the points she seems to intend to make. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* is more of a "Why advocate" book than an "I advocate" book, and from that end, it is rather successful.

The inspiration for the title of Truss's book is expounded on the back with a fairly hilarious story:

> A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.
>
> "Why?" asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.
>
> "I'm a panda," he says, at the door. "Look it up."
>
> The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.
>
> "Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves."
>
> So, punctuation really does matter, even if it is only occasionally a matter of life and death.

This type of humor and easily understandable logic pervades this book, which actually brings a lot of entertainment value to a genre that is not really known for its capacity for enjoyment. Even in this jocular style, Truss is able to articulate several, somewhat complicated, rules and structures for nearly all of our punctuation marks.

She splits the book into seven sections, the first being the introduction, then apostrophes, commas, colons/semicolons, dashes, hyphens, and then the conclusion. In the introduction, she expounds to great length the reason for writing *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*. She speaks about everything that is wrong with punctuation today, from people confusing their plurals with their possessives in displays such as store signs, and ironically, even in movie titles like *Two Weeks Notice* [1], to the "ignorance of grammar" that permeates the text-messaging world (Truss 17). In doing this, Truss provides more than enough justifiable reasons for the rest of her argument; though it borders on ranting, it is justifiable ranting.

As we see in all but a couple of chapters, Truss argues the necessity of punctuation more than anything. She states at the end of her chapter on apostrophes,

> Those spineless types who talk about abolishing the apostrophe are missing the point, and the pun is very much intended. The next day after the abolition of the apostrophe, imagine the scene. Triumphant abolitionist sits down to write, "Goodbye to the Apostrophe: we're not missing you a bit!" and find that he can't. Abolish the apostrophe, and it will be necessary, before the hour is up, to reinvent it. (Truss 67)

Though, perhaps a contraction is not the best word for this argument, as one could easily replace "we're" with "we are," or even "were," and the point would still be made. This, I believe, is where Truss's arguments seem to be a little more nit-picky than proficient. Though the apostrophe is very much necessary when it comes to clarification of possessive or plural-possessive words, it is not at all necessary in contractions. This is something that is ignored completely in the book. Communication and clarification are the ultimate goals for punctuation, anything superfluous is just that; therefore, it is not necessarily needed and should not be argued for. There were a few grammatical mistakes in this book, as I am sure there are some in this book review, but the point is that we both get our points across. If our punctuation (or lack thereof) gets in the way of effective communication, then we need to examine the way in which we are utilizing those little dots and lines; however, proper punctuation is not necessary for proper communication.

If our punctuation (or lack thereof) gets in the way of effective communication, then we need to examine the way in which we are utilizing those little dots and lines; however, proper punctuation is not necessary for proper communication.

When the argument breaks down like this is when the reading becomes quite tedious, as she spends a large amount of the book explaining the different rules to different punctuation marks, many of which are odd and unnecessary. Some are even subjective (i.e., the Oxford comma and whether or not to put a period on the outside of quotation marks). In some instances, she

spends entirely too much time on subjects that have no real effect on communication, which is rather annoying. It's like being told to make your bed, when in a few hours, you're just going to mess up the blankets and sheets again when you go to sleep for the night.

Whenever she argues the necessary parts of punctuation, however, is when her arguments are strongest. She gives impeccable examples of the necessity of punctuation. In her chapter on commas she gives two examples of commas placed in different places: "consider the difference between the following: 'Verily, I say unto thee, This day thou shalt be with me in Paradise.' and: 'Verily I say unto thee this day, Thou shalt be with me in Paradise'" (Truss 74). The placement of commas in this passage of Scripture has given rise to extreme doctrinal differences between Catholics and Protestants. The first interpretation states that the man shall be with Jesus in Paradise on that day: the day of their death. The second interpretation allows there to be time between death and Paradise, thus the Catholic ideal of Purgatory. Who knew that punctuation held the keys to Paradise?

Though there are a plethora of amazing examples in this book, a couple do a little more harm than good. These usually deal with Truss's seeming obsession with the beauty and poetry that can be found in punctuation, specifically in semicolons. She gives this example from Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, to show the ability of the semicolon to "allow us to coast on air, and loop-the-loop":

> As for the other experiences, the solitary ones, which people go through alone, in their bedrooms, in their offices, walking the fields and the streets of London, he had them; had left home, a mere boy, because of his mother; she lied; because he came down to tea for the fiftieth time with his hands unwashed; because he could see no future for a poet in Stroud; and so, making a confidant of his little sister, had gone to London leaving an absurd note behind him, such as great men have written, and the world has read later when the story of their struggles has become famous. (Truss 106-107)

This, in my opinion, isn't the best example to use to show the beauty of the semicolon. No offense to Woolf, but this was just a glorified run-on sentence. And I know that a million people would probably riot against me on this point, but, to me, this passage is burdensome to read, and especially to anyone who might not be able to comprehend the importance of semicolons.

Overall, Truss makes plenty of great arguments for the importance of punctuation, and in an age when punctuation and grammar seem to be non-existent, it is nice to know that someone is out there who actually cares. Though it may be unclear what must be done to reverse this trend of bad grammar, at least sticklers can equip themselves with the weaponry and armor that this book provides.

Josh Forrester recently earned his Bachelor's degree in English from East Central University and is currently a graduate student at New Mexico State University.

Book Review: *Interdisciplinary Education in the Age of Assessment*

by Sheila Rulison

Kaufman, Douglas, David M. Moss, and Terry A. Osborn, eds. *Interdisciplinary Education in the Age of Assessment*. New York: Routledge, 2008. 205 pp. $41.95, paper. ISBN-13: 978-0-8058-5378-0.

This book, a collaboration of several contributors who place a high priority on interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary, instruction, provides a strong case for breaking away from the isolated discipline setup in the secondary schools and replacing, or at least integrating, this traditional instruction with interdisciplinary lessons that place more emphasis on illustrating to our students the connection between disciplines rather than the separate studies of the subject areas.

The process of learning through a transdisciplinary unit is equal in importance to the product of the unit, as opposed to just recognition of objectively testable facts.

The editors juxtapose interdisciplinary studies with the heightened concern over standardized testing, which has become a central driving force in all educational curriculum. Rather than allowing a multiple-choice test to determine if students have acquired the pertinent knowledge of the particular subject matter, the authors of these collected chapters demonstrate the benefits of using a transdisciplinary approach, which parallels real life, to achieve the goals and objectives. The process of learning through a transdisciplinary unit is equal in importance to the product of the unit, as opposed to just recognition of objectively testable facts.

With chapters devoted to science, mathematics, social studies, foreign language, English, and bilingual studies, the authors have provided real-life applications for interdisciplinary studies at the secondary level. The science curriculum focuses not on disconnected trivial scientific facts, but rather on highlighting the timely and relevant issues that challenge society in the future. Mathematics stresses the need to solve complex problems, a skill which can be translated to real-world problems that must be seen from a variety of perspectives. While social studies lends itself easily to cross-curricular study, many times this subject, too, falls prey to the overarching standardized test of historical facts; however, solving complex societal issues requires knowledge and application of a variety of subjects. Foreign language courses frequently study the cultures and customs along with the new language, a model of interdisciplinary studies that can be further integrated into the community as a whole. In the English classroom, students embark upon discussion of literature, which can lead to further inquiry into our world, as opposed to merely focusing on the comprehension skills required for the state-mandated test. Bilingual students can benefit from interdisciplinary studies that are connected rather than fragmented, inclusive rather than exclusive, and balanced rather than one-sided.

Although assessment is one of the major facets of *No Child Left Behind*, accomplishing the *NCLB* standards can be facilitated through interdisciplinary study that teaches students how to make decisions and allows for interaction with a variety of disciplines, which goes above learning merely subject matter. As this book reveals, the barriers of isolated subjects at the secondary level still exist, but the development of interdisciplinary units can be successful in keeping test scores high with the added benefit of teaching students to see the world from a variety of viewpoints, and the latter will lead to success well beyond high school.

Sheila Rulison is working on her doctorate at the University of Oklahoma.

Quickwrite with Pre-service Teachers

by Britton Gildersleeve

Each morning we begin by writing.
From the safety of our circled desks Sarah asks:
"What religious figure would you like to meet?"
This one not too hard—the Dalai Lama.
But she follows the one with the two:
"What would you ask him?"
And my head retreats into itself like the head of a turtle.
Not even Buddha can give me a recipe for teaching.

Instead, perhaps he can tell me
what there is about teaching that stretches
the heart's muscle, opens its ventricles
like windows, through which come wings.
Until all we want for fledgling teachers
(these adult children laughing with me)
is the soft flutter of this joy.

Dr. Britton Gildersleeve teaches writing at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, where she also directs the Oklahoma State University Writing Project.

The State of Our Profession: School Reform by the Book

by Claudia Swisher

Whenever I get frustrated about the state of my profession, I read. I try to learn from others and find a balance between my vision of education, others' visions, and the current reality. Well, the current reality is fairly bleak, and I've been doing a lot of reading—Diane Ravitch's *The Death and Life of the Great American School System,* for one. I literally yelled at the book and the author at times: "We told you so! We knew this!" *Making the Grade* by Todd Farley opened my eyes to the subjectivity of open-ended standardized test items. Some people who are hired to grade and score these short answers cannot read English, and trainers hated teachers as graders because we ask too many questions. Years ago, I read *The Manufactured Crisis* by David Berliner and Bruce Biddle. I felt like a Cassandra, doomed to tell others the truth about education and to be soundly ignored. Schmoker's *Focus* and Pink's *Drive* also gave me glimpses of what education should be. Linda Darling Hammond's *The Right to Learn* was one I quoted huge chunks to all my Facebook friends. I know they enjoyed my passion.

The farther an assessment moves from the classroom, the less useful the results are for classroom teachers, and the less we can use that information to inform our instruction. We need our assessments to accomplish something – to measure, to inform, to instruct.

But, the book that seismically moved my world is *The Myths of Standardized Tests: Why They Don't Tell You What You Think They Do* by Phillip Harris, Bruce Smith, and Joan Harris. I read actively, with a pen, a highlighter, and tiny translucent stickies. This book fairly bristles with stickies, many of them labeled with stars and exclamation points. I felt like I was having a conversation with the authors, and they understood my frustrations. I even returned to the book and typed out six pages of quotes and lines from the authors. It's an important book for all educators to read and to suggest to their non-educator friends.

My purpose here is not to review this book, but to explain how it has fundamentally changed my thinking about testing and its place in education. I'm doing the same reader response I expect of my students and responding from my head and my heart.

Standardized testing has always been part of our world. We all took the tests when we were in elementary or secondary school, and sometimes our parents learned about the results. If we have graduate degrees, the Graduate Record Exam is in our past someplace. Many of us took the SAT or the PSAT or the ACT. Testing is part of the price of doing business in our profession. We teachers know the best information comes from tests we design ourselves, based on the specific objectives we have for our students' learning. The farther an assessment moves from the classroom, the less useful the results are for classroom teachers, and the less we can use that information to inform our instruction. We need our assessments to accomplish something – to measure, to inform, to instruct. Formative, teacher-created assessment does just that.

But what, exactly, are standardized tests designed to accomplish? According to Harris, Smith, and Harris, the main purpose of any standardized test is to predict performance on future tests. Period. That's it. I believe that's the way we used to use them – to identify patterns in achievement. I think we know this intuitively, but have never really studied the notion.

Reading that made me think back on my own career and my own use of standardized testing results. A story that illustrates our knowledge of the real value of testing came to mind as I read. I tutored a student years ago who, on one test, did not perform the way he had in the past. His mother was alarmed; his principal was baffled. I was called in. I was the only person who asked him, "What happened?" His answer still makes me laugh: "Oh, I was bored, so I just answered without reading the questions."That one test broke the pattern of predictability, and his mother responded. She knew current results should mirror past, and should predict future results. When a test didn't do that, she wanted to know why. We all knew his performance should have been comparable to past work, but didn't realize that was the major purpose of the test. The young man's answer, that the test bored him, speaks volumes about what we're doing to our students, and what we've been doing to them for years: boring them with tests that tell us precious little in exchange for the time we allot to them.

So, the notion that standardized tests only predict future performance was one revelation for me, but it wasn't the last. What about the vaunted "objectivity" everyone attributes to standardized tests? Not so. Humans mess up standardized testing from beginning to end – someone has to write the questions, write the responses, norm the tests, choose the questions, order the questions. Someone decides on the correct responses. Someone scores the tests. One of Harris, Smith, and Harris's contentions is objectivity is a complete myth of testing. Human judgment stamps its hand all over our tests.

Once tests become high-stakes, they drive instruction, not curriculum.

But, I felt the ground shift under my feet was when I read their discussion of high-stakes testing and the horrible distortions they create. Remember, tests were designed to predict future performance. But, they now literally decide the future of our third graders, of their teachers, of high school students' ability to graduate and perhaps to be accepted into college; they are part of our AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress). They will also be used to grade schools, based on the performance of our lowest-performing students. The authors speak of the fact once tests become high stakes, they drive instruction, not a curriculum. We see that in Oklahoma at every tested level and in every tested class. If scores matter, then we must do everything in our power to raise scores, including intensive test preparation. Teachers are pressured to prepare students, to practice test-taking strategies, to narrow the curriculum to only those subjects and those standards being tested. Teachers are forced, in self-defense, to spend valuable class time in test preparation. The authors quoted studies that showed some teachers devote as little as 20% of their time in test preparation up to 60% -- not in authentic learning or assessment, but in test preparation.

Harris, Smith, and Harris believe any kind of test prep is cheating. Cheating. It invalidates the tests and invalidates any results. We're not talking about the blatant cheating that makes the news: the excessive erasures, the opening test booklets, changing students' answers…we know that's cheating. I had never considered the test preparation we do to be cheating, but it is gaming the system, trying to find the edge, trying to get those few more points that can mean the difference between a third grader being promoted or being retained. Those points that will mean a satisfactory or an unsatisfactory evaluation of a teacher, or of a school making AYP or not.

They discuss how SAT preparation courses and strategies actually decrease the likelihood that the SAT score will be an accurate predictor of college performance. Think of the healthy industry that's grown up around ACT and SAT preparation. At our school, we regularly schedule a speaker who has hours of stories about how to game the test, how to play it, how to…cheat. I kept coming back to their assertion that standardized tests only predict future performance on other standardized tests, but we're using them to decide which students get into college. In fact, the more intense the test prep, the less likely the score will be in predicting performance in college. And, ironically, the authors even discuss the fact that SAT doesn't predict grades and success in college any better than grades and success in high school. All that time and money and worry invested in one test, in one score on one test, time and money which could be used to participate fully in high school activities, to follow their passions, to volunteer in the community.

Another standardized test that is designed to predict performance is the GRE. We believe it has power to identify those of us who are capable of post-graduate work and those of us who shouldn't bother, but does it? One of the authors had the same experience I did with the GRE – I had a masters' degree, and applied to another graduate program, in another state. One of the requirements, one of the hoops to jump through, was to take the GRE. No one cared that I already had a masters' degree. I argued, to no avail, that my master's degree was a good indication of my ability to do graduate work, but I still had to take the test to check off the box in my admission application. What kind of slavish insanity is that? Even thirty years later, I'm angry.

Other ramifications of high stakes? Pushing out those kids who make your school look bad. Encouraging them to get their GED, or to be absent on the days of the testing. Ignoring the very high-achieving students and the very low-achieving students to concentrate on those students whose scores might be right on the *bubble* and could affect the overall school scores. Narrowing of curricula is a given in this high-stakes climate. What gets tested gets taught. I know elementary teachers who are told not to teach social studies and science since, at the moment, they're not factored into AYP. I know of schools that have reduced recess for little ones so they can work on testing.

So, according to this book, tests are too narrow, don't measure true achievement, and aren't objective. Attaching punishments and rewards to the scores is not appropriate. Standardized tests adversely affect curriculum and teacher choices, and they don't even predict all that well. And yet, we watched our lawmakers attach more and more high-stakes consequences to standardized test-

ing, and send more and more of the limited resources available for education straight into the pockets of testing companies. Millions of Oklahoma dollars get delivered to Pearsons, out of state, with no accountability for poorly-designed or poorly-printed testing materials, for broken promises, and for missed deadlines. Millions of dollars simply disappear into their pockets.

This year, around the country, state Legislatures and state Superintendents of Schools have eagerly found new ways to tie test scores to performance and evaluation. I've heard them talk about accountability and objective measures and success and achievement. Harris, Smith, and Harris are quick to point out there's a huge difference between achievement and a score on a test.

I continued to cling to my copy of *The Myths of Standardized Tests* as I whimpered softly in the corner of my classroom: "But tests are only designed to predict future performance on other tests. Don't you know?" Is it that they don't know, or is it that they don't care?

I wish I could afford, on my teacher's salary, to buy a copy of this book for every Legislator, our Superintendent of Schools, and our Governor. I could only hope they experienced the same internal earthquake. Could we begin a true conversation about school reform once we put the myths of standardized test to rest, once and for all?

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Claudia Swisher comes from a family of educators, teaches Reading for Pleasure at Norman North High School, and is a Nationally Board Certified Teacher and an Oklahoma Writing Project Fellow.

More Pages Please

by Jason Stephenson

Author's Note: Since I wrote this essay in first person, I have referred to sophomore and junior English with Arabic numerals (2, 3) instead of Roman numerals (II, III).

When I discovered the writing portion of the English 2 End-of-Instruction (EOI) exam was only worth 9% of the overall score, I was absolutely floored. In my shock and against my better judgment, I shared my frustration with my students. "You could write a nursery rhyme on the writing test and still score in the advanced category overall," I told them. Being Pre-AP students, they generally performed very well on the standardized portion.

Imagine my horror when one of my students actually responded to one of the two state writing prompts with an illustrated version of "The Itsy Bitsy Spider." She based her decision on the hopes that the second prompt was the field test item and would not be factored into her score. Thankfully, she gambled correctly, as her writing test scores later indicated her other essay had been graded. I told myself in future years I would not tell my students how little the essay was worth until after they had written it.

Flash forward to the 2010-2011 school year. My students and I wrote alongside each other for months. They wrote quick writes, poems, and essays. I kept my lips sealed on how little the essay portion of the English 2 EOI was worth. I wanted them to try their very best because the previous year's writing scores had only been average. I blamed myself for this, believing if my students had treated the essay more seriously, they would have performed better. My students, I thought, were ready for the writing test in April.

Then a new problem emerged. More than half of my students did not have enough room to write their essays. Two-and-a-half wide-ruled pages were not enough. Although students are given an immediate extension of time if they do not finish writing their essay, they are not given any additional pages. I knew this issue existed before the test, and I warned some of my students with exceptionally large handwriting that they would need to write smaller. I did not expect so many of my students to be affected by the page limit.

I composed a letter to Joyce DeFehr, the Executive Director of State Testing in Oklahoma, with the help of my students. We eagerly awaited her reply. Our correspondence follows. Notice that she responds to my first letter but not to my second one.

* * *

April 26, 2011

Dear Joyce DeFehr:

Imagine that you are a sixteen-year-old girl. Your handwriting is large but legible. You are taking the ACE English 2 writing test, and you reach the third and final page of the test packet. You are not allowed to write any more, even though you want to write one more body paragraph before your conclusion. You erase two lines and rewrite your sentences in tiny, cramped letters, hoping to pack in a few final details. You skip the body paragraph you wanted to write, and squeeze in two sentences as a conclusion. You wish you could have written more, but the directions say you cannot write below the final line. You close your test booklet, knowing you could have done better.

My students—like all sophomores in the state of Oklahoma—took the ACE English 2 writing test last week. All year long, I have had my students write a variety of genres. They have written quick writes in their notebooks. They have analyzed models of writing by professionals and my former students. They have revised and edited their drafts in groups. They have even shared their writing in front of the whole class. I did my part to take my students through the writing process with all five state-mandated modes of writing. My sophomores felt confident going into the "EOI." They soon discovered one component beyond their control: a page limit.

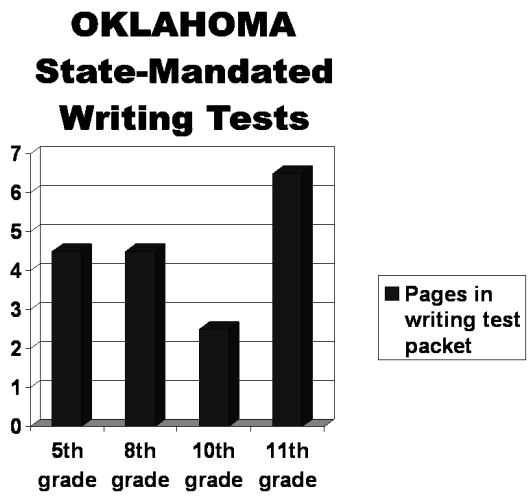
State testing is not the time to go green. As I'm sure you know, students are only given two-and-a-half pages on the ACE English 2 writing test, compared to the six-and-a-half pages on the ACE English 3 writing test. (The page inequality even reaches down to the fifth and eighth grades, which each receive four-and-a-half pages for their state-mandated writing tests.) This hardly seems fair. The essay accounts for 9% of a student's score on the ACE English 2 test, compared to 14% on the ACE English 3 test. Still, the English 2 and the English 3 essays are scored with the same rubric, which awards 30% of the score for ideas and development. How can students be expected to fully develop their ideas when they are given a limited space? Students are given unlimited time to write their essays. Surely they could be given an extra page or two. If paper is too costly, then steps should be taken, so students can write their essays on computers.

Incredibly, 40% of every public Oklahoma high school's Academic Performance Index score is determined by ACE English 2 test scores. Shouldn't a test that determines a school's progress and performance allow students to succeed regardless of the size of their handwriting?

The day after the writing test, I asked my ninety English students, "How many of you would have written more had you been given more space?" Sixty-five of them raised their hands.

Sincerely,

Jason Stephenson
Oklahoma Writing Project Teacher Consultant
Deer Creek High School, Teacher of the Year, 2008-2009



April 27, 2011

Mr. Stephenson,

I appreciate your concern regarding the English 2 Writing test. When this test was put into law by the state legislature in the early 2000s, the intent of this writing component was for students to provide a short writing sample which could be completed within one class period. That is why the overall time on the test is an approximate time of 55 minutes including reading the instructions, planning the response, and composing a short composition worth 6 points towards their overall English 2 score. Giving students more space would have lengthened the writing past showing a sample of their writing and perhaps being able to complete it one class period.

When the English 3 test was implemented in 2008, the ACE Steering Committee desired a different outcome of the writing portion of this test and wanted students to show a more thoughtful and developed response worth more raw score points (10) toward the overall English 3 score.

Let me know if you have any other questions or concerns.

Joyce DeFehr, M. HR

Executive Director, State Testing
Oklahoma State Department of Education
Office of Accountability and Assessments

* * *

May 2, 2011

Dear Joyce DeFehr:

Thank you for your quick response to my letter. I still have a few questions. Why are 5th and 8th graders given two more pages to write than 10th graders? According to PASS, students are expected to write essays of 500-750 words by 8th grade, 750-1000 words by 10th grade, and 1500+ words by 11th grade. I acknowledge that essays of this length would take too much time to score, but it is important to realize that students are progressing as writers. They should be able to write more and more, each year they are in school. So it does not stand to reason to give them 4.5 pages in 8th grade, 2.5 pages in 10th grade, and then 6.5 pages in 11th grade. If the state department wishes to keep the 10th grade test at 2.5 pages, then it should reduce the number of pages given to 8th and 5th graders respectively.

Since the state seems so keen on saving paper, I have discovered another way to limit students' pages. Your example of an English 2 "good response," found on the state department's accountability and assessment website, is 378 words. The English 3 essay, which you say needs to be a "more thoughtful and developed response" is 649 words, a difference of 271 words. By performing some simple cross multiplication, factoring in the 2.5 pages for English 2, I discovered that English 3 only needs 4.29 pages, which could be rounded up to a generous 4.5. The

state, however, gives 6.5 pages for the English 3 test. [See chart below.] Imagine all the paper (and money) the state could save if they eliminated two whole pages from every English 3 students' writing test packet!

If, on the other hand, you would not like to reduce the English 3 page count, then it would only be fair to give more pages to English 2. By using the standard of 6.5 pages for the English 3 sample essay and its 649 words, and acknowledging that the English 2 sample essay has 370 words, then cross multiplication means the ACE English 2 test should have 3.78 pages, which could be rounded up to 4.

However, if the test packet is to stay at 2.5 pages, then how do you suggest I prepare my students for the exam? Should I spend class time instructing my students to write smaller? Would it be acceptable to tell them to draw lines in between the printed lines of the test packet, effectively doubling the amount of space they have?

Sincerely,

Jason Stephenson

	English 2	**English 3**		**English 2**	**English 3**
Words*	378	649		378	649
Pages	X	6.5		2.5	X
	X = 3.78			X = 4.29	

***based on the "good response" samples on the state's assessment and accountability website*

* * *

I can understand why I didn't receive a response to my second letter. My tone was harsh and disrespectful, but my passion comes from a good place. I want what's best for my students—for all the sophomore students in Oklahoma who must take a writing test in a confined number of pages.

Besides, do I really need a test to confirm what I already know about my students? That they have written more in my class than in any other class. That they have learned a language to discuss writing traits. That they have improved as writers through their word choice, style, and development. That they know how to start and end an essay.

Now that I understand the state department is looking more for a "sample" of writing as opposed to an actual essay on the English 2 EOI, I could change my instruction in hopes of getting higher scores. I don't think I will. I'm still waiting for this year's test results. My students felt very good about their essays, despite the fact that most of them ran out of room. And none of them, as far I know, wrote "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" as their writing sample.

* * *

The state example is typed in a small Tekton font, easily fitting on a page and a half.

Example of a Good Response

Writing Task

Last year, I helped organize a surprise party for my friend Josie's cousin who had just moved from Texas. Brandon didn't know many people, and we thought a party would be a way for him to make new friends. Josie needed help with the plans, so I volunteered. Little did I know the real purpose of the party!

I had some experience planning parties. A surprise party for my mom a couple of years ago turned out really well, and I wanted to try another. The next one was for Josie's birthday. She came home from school one day and all her friends jumped out and yelled "Surprise!" Everyone had a great time, so I organized more surprise parties. For one, a group of us arrived at the birthday girl's house early one Saturday morning and took her downtown still in her pajamas for a pancake breakfast.

I enjoyed thinking up new ways to spring the surprises, but after a while people began to expect a party, and the element of surprise was gone. Josie's cousin was new in town, though, so that wouldn't be a problem.

In secret Josie and I invited about fifteen people. We asked people to bring a funny or silly gift. I got Brandon a pair of those gag glasses that have eyeballs on springs.

Looking back, I realize that I missed the signs that things would turn out differently. For example, I offered to pick up Brandon, but Josie insisted that she would phone him at the last minute. I never suspected a thing—not even when, on the night of the party, Josie decided there wasn't enough food and sent me out to buy more. When I got back, juggling bags of potato chips and bottles of soda, fifteen people jumped out and yelled "Surprise!"

The state example is typed in a small Tekton font, easily fitting on a page and a half.

Brandon was there, laughing as hard as he could. Josie explained that my friends had planned the whole thing to show how much they appreciated the parties I'd organized for everyone else.

So the party did not turn out exactly the way I had expected—but I certainly wouldn't change a thing. I had expected to have fun, and I did. Only I didn't know I'd be wearing a pair of glasses with eyeballs on springs.

A student cannot finish the state's model essay in the mandated 2.5 pages with her large handwriting.

Writing Task

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A student cannot finish the state's model essay in the mandated 2.5 pages with her large handwriting.

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Brandon was there, laughing as hard as he could.

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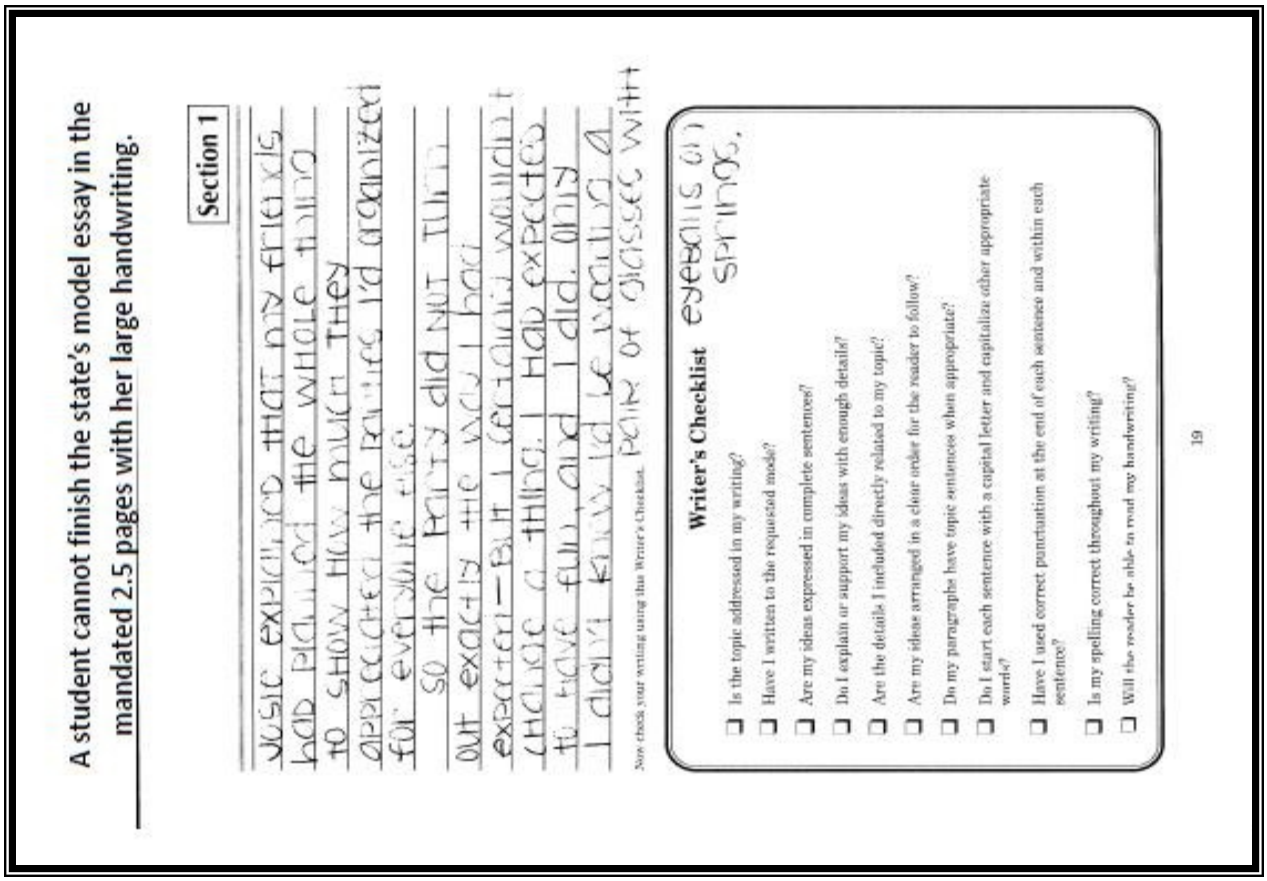
Note: This is the same composition offered as the state sample, only written in the commonly large handwriting of a tenth-grade student.



Jason Stephenson teaches Pre-AP English II and creative writing at Deer Creek High School in Edmond. He is writing his master's thesis in English on the mythmaking of Sherman Alexie.

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Young Adult Literature: Book Review

by Eril Hughes

Vande Velde, Vivian. *Never Trust a Dead Man*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1999. 194 pp. $17.00, hardback. ISBN-13: 978-0152018993.

The hardback cover of Never Trust a Dead Man features an old witch and a malevolent bat hanging from the hand of a somewhat uncertain teenager. What could be more appealing to a young adult audience? And the book itself is as good as its cover. It deservedly won several awards, including the 2000 Edgar Allan Poe Award for Best Young Adult Mystery, and it made the American Library Association's Best Book List and Quick Picks for Reluctant Readers List in 2000.

My favorite character was Farold, the one who gets killed before page one of the novel. Farold's first appeal is that he comes back to life in the body of a bat. (Okay, the spell went "slightly" wrong.) Farold has as bad an attitude as a bat as he did as a human, and this attitude humorously grates on the very last nerve of Selwyn, the seventeen-year-old character who is determined to clear himself of the accusation of killing Farold. (Okay, it's more than just an accusation. The whole village is convinced that Selwyn is guilty, and he is sealed in the burial cave with Farold's body, because the village wants Selwyn to pay for his "crime"!)

The plot becomes even more interesting when Selwyn enlists Farold to help find out who the murderer really is. (You see, Farold was very soundly asleep before he was stabbed in the back with Selwyn's knife, becoming very soundly dead, and he has no idea who the killer was.) The exciting escape from the burial cave comes with the help of a witch. (I won't tell any of the truly horrific details about the cave, but trust me, teenagers will love it!)

I also like the fact that the rest of the novel concentrates more on the unraveling of the mystery than on the supernatural elements, and the rest of the book has its appealingly clever moments amongst the logical, and often humorous, unraveling of the murder. It's when Farold the bat becomes a goldfinch–don't ask how!–that the humor really increases. This goldfinch has a habit of hanging on its perch upside down when it sleeps, and it sounds more like a chicken (or sometimes a crow!) than a goldfinch. After all, how else could you explain the disguised bat lips trying to make like a goldfinch! Oh yeah, more humor comes in when Selwyn is disguised as a female in order to find out more about the activities of eight suspects in the village. (Farold wasn't exactly popular, you see.)

The book's end accounts for all the necessary MOM elements of a good murder: Method, Opportunity, and Motive are all taken care of. Hint: the motive is connected with romance, adding another young adult appeal.

Note: I love it that the inspiration for this book came from the opening of the old Orson Welles version of Othello, when the author thought that Iago and Othello were going to be buried together. (See http://www.vivianvandevelde.com/bookDetail.cfm?BookId=31#Anchor2 for full explanation.) This mistake became the idea for the start of Never Trust a Dead Man.

Dr. Eril Hughes is Professor of English in the Department of English and Languages at East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma, and a longtime member and officer of OCTE.

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