The Story of My Thinking

Expository Writing Activities for 13 Teaching Situations

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For Kendall, Matilde, Kelsey, Julian
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After twenty-five years in the classroom, I can confess that I've had a really bad attitude about expository writing.

I was raised writing five-paragraph essays in the traditional forms, in traditional units of instruction. You've written these too: the descriptive paper; the compare-and-contrast paper; the cause-and-effect paper; the persuasive paper. These are predictable and pure. They start with introductions that unveil the strong thesis statement. They include three body paragraphs. The conclusion reminds the reader of the thesis and repeats it in some new and interesting way. These papers are not messy. They are tidy.

As I grew older, the papers included Kate Turabian–style footnotes and bibliographies, then MLA. These papers grew more sophisticated in syntax, but they left me unthrilled. So did most of the informational, persuasive, and research papers my students wrote. In separating voice and student ownership from the writing, I was asking my students to produce academic-sounding pieces. False pieces.

As a teacher assigning these papers, something else nagged at me: nobody reads papers like these. Not by choice, anyway. Teachers are the only audience of these papers. That may be one of the reasons I thought they were academic.

Then I considered Thomas Newkirk's thought, that real essays "foster and track movement of the mind." This rings true for me, especially when I think about the magazine articles I love to read. They don't follow the structures of the tidy, traditional forms of expository writing units. In fact, tracking movement means there's motion. There's a narrative, even if it's something like a train of thought. This movement satisfies the needs of a reader, offering discovery and maybe some surprises.

So students could use structures that more closely track the movement of their mind, weaving their own slaloms between the twins, knowledge and experience. "I did this, and then this happened, and I thought this, but then this person told me that, so I
wondered this, which led me to that, and now I think this.” Readers would be more inclined to lean in and vicariously experience that movement of the mind, wouldn’t they?

Oh yes, they would. In the foreword to *Strange Bedfellows*, Jim Burke comments: “We read for the conversations that texts invite us to have about the world, human nature, and ourselves. Every text is an invitation to converse and we bring to these encounters a different urgency and perspective at various stages of our lives” (Miller 2008; Foreword by Jim Burke).

But debate arises in the room when teachers compare notes about the validity of student-created text structures and narratives in expository writing. I feel something discordant twanging in me when I hear the lament: “I can’t use individualized structures or narrative frames. I don’t teach creative writing. I teach academic writing.”

Thus crystallized for me a huge piece of my own attitude problem with expository writing. Is high-quality academic writing written only for the eyes of teachers or university professors? Isn’t there also rich writing, academic writing, written for voluntary readers, for the general public? What is the role of readers in rigorous, academic writing?

As luck would have it, I found myself having breakfast one morning with Carol Jago, whose voice rang with conviction as she considered my questions:

**GB:** Do you think there’s such a thing as academic writing for an audience, and not just for a teacher?

**CJ:** The best academic writing is always for an audience. If you don’t see the audience, if the audience is just the grade or the score on the test, then it might be a proficient performance, but it’s never going to be a great performance. It’s never going to be a product you care about. The challenge for us is that right now it’s only the kids who grow up in an intellectual family and community who know the pleasure and joys of that kind of writing, thinking, talking. Other students don’t have the chance unless their teachers bring it into the classroom. And so we need to bring that kind of scholarly pursuit, that scholarly distinction to our classrooms. The best academic writing is truly argumentative. It’s conversational. It’s dialogue. Discourse. You can argue something vehemently, effectively, and, at the end of the day, change your mind. That’s the kind of thing that makes writing interesting for students, stretching for students, but it’s not often done in school. We’re caught up in this society, enthralled with test scores and the rest. Teaching kids to do the bare minimum to pass proficiently the state assessment in writing.
GB: So where can you go in the world to find good examples of academic writing? Where’s the best place?


GB: You would consider those academic, even though they’re not written in MLA format?

CJ: Oh yeah. Those are the essays that make a difference in the world. Often things that appear in MLA format are just for other academics. Talk about no audience. Is that a real audience? Just when you’re talking to people just like you?

GB: Why do I keep thinking that academic writing for other academicians is the only real form of academic writing?

CJ: I think we created that dichotomy ourselves by not thinking hard enough about the larger world. A true scholar should be intent also upon changing the world, not just about getting tenure. Not just about getting a good grade. True scholars are so passionate about what they know that they know that they need to take it out to the world. I think Michael Pollan is one of the best examples. There’s one botanist who has changed the world.

After Carol went on her way, I thought about what she had said. I realized that I’d been operating from some sort of archaic, English-teachery view of academic writing, and that I needed, as Carol said, to think harder about the larger world. I thought also about how the world has changed.

I thought about TED talks. About Sir Ken Robinson’s TED talk about creativity, in particular. If you haven’t heard it, google it! Of course his discourse was academic. And it was also delightful and thought-provoking, not at all dry, dense, or hard to choke down.

But still, I felt secretly hypocritical when I faced a classroom of young and developing students, all of whom I wanted to prepare for college-level writing. How would I move them toward this level? For developing writers, must creativity and analysis be mutually exclusive?
My Self-Inflicted Confusion About Personality in Academic Writing, and How Thomas Newkirk Helped Me Reframe It

One day I asked Thomas Newkirk a similar question, trying to put my finger on whatever sore spot was creating my conflict. Shouldn’t the student’s personality be absent in academic writing? He chuckled and answered, “Only in bad academic writing.” I realized in an instant my confusion, contained in the chuckle of a distinguished academician: rigor doesn’t mean students must write badly.

Personality isn’t the same as level of formality, Dr. Newkirk explained. “Personality is one of your tools, and if you say I’m going to be impersonal, you’ve lost one of your great tools as a writer. It’s a lie that academic writing means you have to dispense with your personality. My enthusiasm, my passion for things, there’s a place for that in analytic writing. There’s a necessity for it. That’s what sustains us as readers and writers.”

So how do we teach that?

My Secret Balking over Pure (Fake) Forms of Expository Writing and How Harvey Daniels Helped Me See Through It

Students walk into every classroom boisterous or subdued, but filled with their own entusiasms and passions. How do we harness all that student-ness for writing really good expository pieces? How do we break down this process and convert it to concrete steps for students?

I ponder the structures we’ll need to use for expository writing. Personal narratives are a snap to organize, since they’re basically sequential. But what about expository writing? Writing information, or literary analysis, or persuasive arguments?

Jerome Bruner divides the two ways that we talk about what we know: logico-scientific thinking, about physical things, and narrative thinking, about people and situations. Should I separate these for classroom focus? Usually we have a more delightful experience in classes when our students are writing their experiences in their personal narratives, and if I knew how to mesh the two processes more effectively, my attitude toward analytic writing might improve.
Harvey Daniels’ voice has been ringing in my ear since a 2002 *Voices from theMiddle* article when he pointed out that these “pure” forms of expository writing are not what we find in newspapers:

As we read further into these three articles, we find much more complex, diverse, and recursive organizational patterns than the trusty old curriculum guides led us to expect. There is a welter of structures used in each piece, with the authors seeming to slide between one and another, a paragraph at a time, without warning. After an opening vignette, there might be a paragraph listing some items of import, followed by another vignette, told chronologically; then there might be the posing of a problem and some possible solutions, followed by a sequence of past events, a list of examples just piled on top of each other, and then still more narrative. All these articles seem to be organizational hybrids; nothing is simple or straightforward. (9)

Organizational hybrids. His focus was on reading, but his observations have powerful implications for writing, as well. Writing organizational hybrids is a pretty serious goal. How do we aim students toward those?

And before organizing their thoughts, students face an even more daunting task. How do they get thoughts to organize? How do we get students to generate content? To come up with stuff? Often we teachers sidestep this question and hand students predigested topics. I can hear student questions: “What do you want me to write about?” “What do you want it to sound like?” “What do you want me to say about this topic?” “How long does it need to be?” Sometimes I have to suppress an urge to make up crazy answers. But if we really want the students to do the composing, we cannot hand them answers to all of those questions, or we are the composers. They ask these questions because they want to do it right.

**My Own Inner Turmoil About Canned Expository Units**  
**and How James Moffett Helped Me Replace Them**

So our task evolves. We need to find a way to help students unearth their own topics, to generate plenty of content, and to organize it so that readers can track the movement of the writer’s mind.

And then I turn to The Book on my teaching bookshelf. There it is, blue and tattered. William Strong called it “the Rosetta stone” for English teachers, James
Moffett’s *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*. And once again, in it I find exactly what I need:

In interior dialogue we have subjective, spontaneous, inchoate beginnings of drama (what is happening), narrative (what happened), exposition (what happens), and argumentation (what may happen). As it bears on curriculum, this means that students would tap, successively, their inner streams of sensations, memories, and ideas, as raw material for recordings, narrative reports, and essays of generalization and theory. (1968, 40)

As I digest this passage, I write notes:

Drama—what is happening
Narrative—what happened
Exposition—what happens
Argumentation—what may happen

If we could tap a student’s inner thought stream, theoretically, one memory, one sensory reaction, or one idea could provide raw material for any kind of writing, just by jiggling the verb tense. I think about quick lists, kernel essays, and indelible moments that we’ve already been using, and the floodgates open.

As I feel that clamoring hope, the Young Frankenstein Gene Wilder voice rises in me, “This . . . could . . . work!” And I wish, for the thousandth time, that I could thank James Moffett.

My Lingering Qualms About Assessing Opinion Writing and Calling It Informative, and How the Common Core State Standards Helped Me Make Peace with It

Many of our state assessments ask younger students to write about their opinions (e.g., their favorite person, day, pet). Different states label this kind of writing in different ways, and it has bothered me. Isn’t it important for our students to be able to distinguish between information and opinion?

Then I absorbed this from the Common Core State Standards on developing writers:

Although young children are not able to produce fully developed logical arguments, they develop a variety of methods to extend and elaborate their work by providing examples, offering reasons for their assertions, and
explaining cause and effect. These kinds of expository structures are steps on the road to argument. In grades K–5, the term “opinion” is used to refer to this developing form of argument. (Appendix A, 23)

So if we’re asking students to tell us an opinion, we are asking for an assertion, or argument, in its fledgling state. By asking them to explain plenty about why they have that opinion, they are doing quite a bit of informing. The important thing is that they have plenty of chances to write about topics that are meaningful to them, in a variety of ways, for a variety of situations. Then they will be ready for tests.

**An Overview of What We Know About the Writing Process**

These steps may not happen sequentially, but they include:

1. **Generating content that satisfies an itch**
   
   In any really good piece of writing, there is some satisfaction that happens between the reader and the writer, some need being addressed. Various kinds of writing have various kinds of dynamics. The more sharply the itch is felt, the more urgent is the writing.

2. **Finding a structure that serves the writer and reader**
   
   Students move from structures that are teacher-chosen to student-chosen, to student-created. Well-wrought structures move a reader through the writer’s thoughts, creating a chance for the reader to “track the movement of the mind” of the writer. The writer designs that experience for the reader and composes a kernel essay, a short version of the reader’s journey.

3. **Detailing the writing through a combination of strategies**
   
   Students flesh out the short version with snapshots, thoughtshots, sensory details, dialogue, and various other types of information.

4. **Selecting the genre for delivery to the audience**
   
   Students tailor the writing to suit the requirements of the form for their writing. In a Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing, a coalition of writing educators urges us to prepare students for college by designing writing:

   with genuine purposes and audiences in mind (from teachers and other students to community groups, local or national officials, commercial interests, students’ friends and relatives, and other potential readers) in order to foster flexibility and rhetorical versatility. Standardized writing curricula or assessment instruments that emphasize formulaic writing for nonauthentic audiences will not reinforce the habits of mind and the experiences necessary for success as students encounter the writing demands of postsecondary education. (2011, 3)
So how do we enter into this process in our classrooms? What do we do first? What if it's October and we have done other things first? Oh no, I'm midstream, my population is diverse: four needy, three dysgraphic, seven ADHD, two behaviorally scary, four low-level, three newcomers, four so gifted I'm bonkers. And three absent.

**How to Use This Book**

In *Holding On to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones*, Thomas Newkirk (2009) says that “teaching is profoundly situational.” Knowing that, we have based the chapters on teaching situations you could find yourself in. The one truth that does not change for us teachers, ever, is that there is never enough time.

So this book is for teachers who need a lesson but don’t have time to read a book before applying it. We’ve based the lessons on teaching situations, because it really does depend. Feel free to dip in and out of lessons; flip to the glossary if you need a refresher about what a kernel essay is; use the chart instead of the pages if you like; adapt at your leisure.

For each lesson, you’ll find a description of the teaching situation followed by the summary of the lesson. In the next section, “Teaching It,” we’ve included a transcript of what you’d see if you walked into our classrooms and saw us teaching this lesson. Does that mean you must teach it identically? Only if you’re doing comedy. Of course it’s not a script for you to follow, but a model that we offer. It’s a glimpse into our classrooms. Your classroom is uniquely yours, and we hope you share glimpses back with us.

Students work best when they have choices. Clearly, the same is true of teachers. So with all of this attitude change swimming in my head, my colleague Dottie Hall and I have committed to helping every teacher think about how you approach analytic writing with your students. We hope you will be as energized by the process as we have been.
Inner Streams/
Gritty Life

If You Want Them to Explore Topics
for Deep Development
and Systemic Growth

Basic Steps

1. Create gritty life quick list
2. Kernel essay #1 (write/share)
3. Kernel essay #2 (write/share)
4. Kernel essay #3 (write/share)
5. Choose one
6. Add details

Tools

- Gritty life quick list
- Kernel essay planning sheet (in appendix)
- Text structure choices (see pages 145–165)

Setting the Scene

It’s probably early in the year. You’d like to explore what thoughts the
students may be having, without directing them too much, and to show
them that they can easily take their own swirling, shapeless thoughts
and sculpt them into wonderfully organized and coherent essays.

The Point

For informative writing assignments, teachers have traditionally turned to units and pre-
written topics. James Moffett (1968) says that we should use students’ ideas, and not
just their memories, as raw material for all kinds of academic work. But how do we
capture the background thoughts they walk in with? This exercise helps to mine those topics, topics that are more like the grit in our lives, topics that can be useful for any kind of expository writing.

**Teaching It**

*(Students will need paper in front of them, or they can make this list in the backs of their journals, in their writing folders, wherever it makes sense to keep a list of topics.)*

- “Do you ever have a hard time thinking up something to write about?”
- “Think about this: when a conversation is over, it’s not really over, is it? You might walk away from it, but your brain keeps it going, and you replay the conversation, imagining what else the other person would say, what else you would say, revising it, continuing it. That happens with all of your conversations. When you walk into this classroom, your brain is operating dozens of mental conversations at once. Those are a gold mine for writing topics. Today we’re going to do some digging for topics.”
- “Number your papers 1 to 12.”
- “For numbers 1 and 2, do you have any pet peeves? When people do these things, it makes you growl. Maybe they happen at home or school, or maybe at the grocery store, in the car, at the movies, anywhere. List two.”
- “For numbers 3 and 4, what’s on your shopping list? Name two items that you need to buy at the grocery store or any other kind of store.”
- “For numbers 5 and 6, think back through the last couple of weeks. Think about all the conversations you have had with your friends or with family. List two topics of conversation, two things you have talked about with your friends or family in the last couple of weeks.”
- “For numbers 7 and 8, think about the things you own. Some are treasures, and some are just stuff. List two things you own that you’re glad are yours.”
- “For 9 and 10, consider this: when you were born, you weren’t able to do very much. Since then, you have learned to do many things. List two things you can do, things that you can do well now.”
“For 11 and 12, think about all the things that have been in the news. These could be about sports, about our city or state, about the world. List two topics that have been in the news.”

“This is your gritty life quick list. You can write about any of the topics here, and we will use some of them, too.”

Debriefing

“Which topics were the easiest to think of?”

“Which topics were most difficult?”

(Compare student responses to make the point that nothing works equally well for all writers, that we all need choices so that we can use what works best for us.)

Resources

James Moffett’s Teaching the Universe of Discourse

What to Do Next

- Select one of the topics.
- Guide students through a kernel essay, using the text structure for that topic.
- Have students share aloud in groups.
- Put the kernel essays aside.
- Repeat this process on subsequent days, until students have several kernel essays that they have shared with peers.
- Have students select their favorite kernel essay and flesh it out with details. (Use infoshots or the text icons chart for a variety of details.)

Spin-offs

- Instead of using all of the topics in the same class period, you can use them one at a time, in greater depth. For ideas, see “Gritty life quick list, detailed,” next, to spend more time on each. You could make a Friday list for Monday writing, on each of these detailed categories.
- For more variety, try changing any words in the questions. Or insert the word not into any of the questions (one thing you can not do well, one thing that’s not on your shopping list).
- To include literature, you could have students write these lists from a point of view of a literary character (e.g., Charlotte’s pet peeves, Wilbur’s favorite possession, Templeton’s shopping list).
# Gritty Life Quick List, Detailed

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MEMORY</strong></td>
<td>Moments: when you felt proud of someone else or involving a struggle. Things you wish you were on video. You had a snapshot of something moment. Bird moment. Inset moment. Hair moment. Clothing moment. Shoes moment. With an animal. During a holiday. Moment you want to remember.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPETENCY</strong></td>
<td>Something you can do. Noises you can make. Arts/drawings you know how to do. Things you can say in another language. Songs/poems you can perform. Athletic (specific) leads you've learned to do. Things related to games. Food prep. Comm skills. Other skills. Secret skills.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CONVERSATIONS</strong></td>
<td>What you have talked about. With family. With a friend. In the last 2 days. On the phone. During a meal. In email. On your way somewhere. Things you've learned. Things you have changed your life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SHOPPING LIST</strong></td>
<td>Things you need to buy or replace. Food you don't want to run out of. Clothing items you need to replace. Electronics that have changed your life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PET PEEVES</strong></td>
<td>Things that people do that bother you. At home. At school. At the movies. In restaurants. At a store.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6-3  Gritty life quick list, detailed

May be photocopied for classroom use. © 2012 Gretchen S. Bernabei and Dorothy Hall from *The Story of My Thinking* (Heinemann: Portsmouth, NH).
Student Samples

One Kernel, So Many Spin-off Lessons

Consider this kernel essay, using the pet peeve structure:

1. I was trying to enter the freeway on a warm, crowded day, and behind me was a black souped-up Mustang sitting on my bumper.
2. Gee, I thought, what is this guy’s problem?
3. About that time he zoomed around me barely missing my bumper.
4. Why can’t there be a rule that men are banned from driving on the freeway?
5. Men are rude. Why can’t men drivers be polite and courteous?

—Jennifer B. Ferguson, teacher

When asked “If your students produced something like this in class, what would you do next? How would you use this?” a group of teachers in Katy, Texas, knew what they might do with it next:

They said . . .

- Add it to the students' writing folders under “ideas.”
- Develop into a personal narrative concerning a time I felt justified.
- Write conversational narratives for writing dialogue.
- Turn this into a rough draft. Then share and fill in the missing pieces.
- Shape it into informative writing:
  - What makes people mad
  - Ways people can be selfish
  - How to avoid a fight
  - News article about an incident
- Turn into compare and contrast, using different situations or different people at different times.
- Use the questions from kernel essays to help students develop anecdotes, short stories used to make a point, which they can then use as a part of a narrative essay, introduction to a persuasive essay, or introduction to an expository topic.
- Introduce a story about a relationship with the person who caused the pet peeve.
Use it as a good lead for a persuasive essay, with students giving opposing sides:
- Letter to the editor, on using your blinker when driving
- Editorial writing

Make a great testimonial. I could see this used as a “what not to do” writing, too. Not so much for the actions of others but for your response to the situation.

Turn this into a great public service announcement, including technology; make a trailer, possibly lead to research writing.

Turn it around and advocate it.

Teach word choice by drawing a scale for a continuum of words, from slightly annoyed to irate!

Take your #1 sentence and come up with a how-to paper.

Take your #4 sentence to do a persuasive paper.

Use it to introduce the concepts of tone and voice.

Write it both with a serious tone and with a humorous tone.

Demonstrate how one topic can become informative, persuasive, anything.

Use it at the beginning of the year to get to know the students.

Sample kernel essays, using the text structure “prized possession”:

I just couldn’t do without my camera.
It is the most super thing that I can use. It captures moments I might not remember.
It has a place that you can see how many pictures that are left.
Before I had it I was incomplete.
That’s why I need it.
Without it I would not have a very great memory and I wouldn’t know much about my family.

—S. Ransdell, grade 6

I just couldn’t do without my dog, Max.
He is the most important thing that I love the most.
It has black and white dots.
Before I had it I was scared to sleep by myself.
That’s why I like him.
Without it I would be scared.

—Riana, grade 6
I just couldn't do anything without my glasses. It is the most important thing that I have. Without them I couldn't see well at all. It has lenses that make me see clearly. Before I had it I was miserable. I couldn't see. That's why I need glasses which I have now.

Without it I have the worst eyes in the world.

—Bryce, grade 6

Example kernel essays written by teachers:

I never considered myself a cloud reader. But then, I grew up watching and learning from my grandfather, a 4th grade-educated sharecropper. That's when I learned to look at the clouds and what is over, under, beside, and beyond them in addition to shape, color, texture, and density. So now I can look at the clouds and exactly predict the weather in Texas.

—Marla Goldfader, teacher

I've never considered myself very ethnic or intriguing. I grew up in Texas to a Caucasian family without any exciting recipes. But then I decided to try some ethnic foods and recipes. That's when I tried lasagna for the first time. I mean real lasagna with homemade bolognese and fresh basil. So now when I want to feel intriguing, accomplished, I'll try a new recipe. Even if I am just a plain old white girl.

—Lindsay E. Askins, teacher
I need to buy Deacon’s 4th birthday cake. Without it, Deacon’s party will not be super. This causes me mixed emotions. Eventually, Deacon will not need birthday cakes. And so I’d better savor this time with my boys because they won’t be little forever. I only hope Deacon always remembers how much we love him.

—Margo Faulkner, teacher

I need to buy strawberries. Without it, I’ll have to eat the icky ones rotting in the fridge. This causes me to gag. Eventually, I’ll have to go to Randall’s anyway. And so, I’ll do this on the way home from here. I only hope I can get out of Randall’s without the chips, dip, chocolate bars and M&Ms I really want.

—Jennifer Gwydir, teacher

The following kernel essays show the startlingly broad range of content that students and teachers will use to fill in the same kernel.
**How Things Are Going**

When I was young I wondered about what my brother was doing.

I thought that probably he was either doing push-ups or in class somewhere.

Since then, I learned that though he’s at the military academy, he’s not always working out or doing drills.

All I really need to know now is, is he really doing OK like he says he is?

Eventually I will get to call him again and he’ll tell me what’s going on up there and I’ll tell him what happens here.

—Cameron Young, grade 6

**Gossip**

When I was young I wondered about the vicious words coming out of adults mouths.

I thought that probably adults were talking about a brutal person.

Since then, I’ve tried to keep my slender mouth shut, avoiding arguments.

All I really need to know now is how comments trigger brains to stop the problem.

Eventually, I will stop the madness, leaving our many raced world at peace.

—Leggy Q., grade 6

**Allergies**

When I was young, I wondered about being allergic to everything and what that would be like.

I thought that probably no one was allergic to everything.

Since then, I have discovered that I am allergic to pollen.

All I really need to know now is, if I am allergic to kiwi, one of my favorite fruits.

Eventually, I will find out if I am allergic to kiwi.

—Lizzie Barry, grade 6
Mansions in India

(I read this in Ripley’s Believe It or Not)
When I was young I wondered about rich people.
I thought that probably they could have anything they wanted.
Since then, I have realized it takes work to earn money.
All I really need to know now is how a single man could make a billion dollar house in India.
Eventually, I will visit India to learn about their lifestyle and the type of jobs they have that would give a man a billion dollars for a house.

—Abbey Williams, grade 6

Lurking in the Dark

When I was young, I wondered about creatures lurking in the dark.
I thought that probably they would eat me.
Since then, I have SOMEWHAT overcome that fear.
All I really need to know now is, where do they hide?
Eventually, I will find their hideout.

—Mattie Vasquez, grade 6

Female Discrimination

When I was young I wondered about why most stay at home parents were female.
I thought that probably it was just their job.
Since then, I’ve realized that it’s not their “job” but it’s something that’s been drilled into them and made a stereotype over the past centuries.
All I really need to know now is that I am just as equal as the next person, and should have equal opportunities.
Eventually I will hope to instill that we are all equal, and should not be deprived or discriminated against because of our gender.

—Demar Gunter, grade 6

When I was young, I wondered about where my mom was taking us for dinner.
I thought that probably, the food there would be really good.
Since then, it always reaches my mind: Where or what we are eating for dinner.
All I really need to know now is, what food they serve there. Is it good?
Eventually I will make the decisions for dinner, but for now, that’s my mom’s job.

—Eliana Bennington, grade 6
When I was young, I wondered about how men and women stayed together for more than 25 years. I thought that probably only the really “nice” and spiritually good people stayed together. Since then I have discovered that patient people, human doormats, frozen-emoticon bodies, or saints can create a long-term relationship. All I really need to know now is how to keep my spouse alive and viable for 30 more years. Gradually, God will show me the tools I need to spare with my spouse and grant me a fresh peppering of patience.

—Jo Rose, teacher

When I was young I would wander about the yard looking for things to put in my fairy garden. It was not really my fairy garden. It was the fairy’s fairy garden. I was just working on it. I thought that probably the fairies came out only at night because I had never really seen one. I say “really seen” one because I had seen things that may have been fairies. Since then I do not need proof of the fairies. I know they exist. All I really need to know now is where is the best place to get my fairy garden supplies. Gradually, I stopped making fairy gardens but not before I taught my daughter how to make one.

—Toni Gloria Canestaro, teacher

When I was young I wondered about what it would be like to live somewhere else other than my hometown of Beeville. I thought that probably living somewhere else where the weather, people, and outdoor activities would be different. Since then, I’ve learned that although things are different out there, it’s always the same—I would be there. All I need to know now is how to look in my own backyard with new, interesting and creative eyes. Gradually, I began to transform things where I lived starting with my office, then on to the other parts of my house.

—Sylvia Vasquez, teacher
This fully detailed piece was written first as a kernel essay and then detailed by the author, a teacher. He posted it on his blog about using technology in the classroom.

**Seeking the White Hart**

When I was young, I wondered about the White Hart, that mythical creature sent by the gods to the brave hunter on a quest for something more. I encountered the White Hart story in many a tale, a creature hovering at the edge of vision, a heartbeat from despair and failure. *Clay Burell seeks the White Hart*, which he characterizes like this:

My hard drive has dozens and dozens of carefully selected ebooks about my areas of interest right now—primarily World History and Chinese History. I’ve invested a good bit of cash into this because I want a “searchable academic library” on my laptop, out of the following heretical conviction: academic ebooks on a hard drive are a better resource than the internet . . . it would be even more magical if my hard drive search results looked more like Google’s, and less like Mac’s.

I thought that probably I could be the hunter on a journey to save his people (in this case, a fellow edublogger), seeking out the divine wisdom (Google), with only my strength, wits, and the mercy from above (search engine results) to find that which the people need.

Since then, since I began my search, I’ve begun to despair that what I’ve found is truly worthwhile. What if the solution I’ve found isn’t the right one? Perhaps, it is merely an illusion, a false trail laid by no one, and I’ve wasted precious moments down the wrong trail to a box canyon? What if *Google Quick Search* isn’t the right answer? When I installed *Google Quick Search* on my Mac running OS X.6 Leopard, it gave me these results when I searched on Moodle, the start of many a PDF document on my machine:

All I really need to know now is if this is the solution that Clay had in mind when he began searching. Gradually, I hope that desktop search tools will become better integrated and the tools work well.

—Miguel Guhlin, teacher
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