Workshopping Lives: Writing Workshop in a Writing to Heal Class

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Creating the Class

This writing-intensive course examines writing as a catalyst for healing after loss or grief. In a workshop focused on student writing, we will analyze the fiction, drama, poetry and creative nonfiction of Arthur Miller, Jane Austen, Frank McCourt, C.S. Lewis, William Wordsworth, Joan Didion, Susan Minot. Reading James W. Pennebaker's *Opening Up* and Rico's *Pain and Possibility* will create a theoretical underpinning for our discussions. Assignments for this course will include formal analytical essays, creative work, as well as electronic journals and oral presentations.

*My tongue will tell the anger of my heart.*

*Or else my heart, concealing it, will break:*

*And rather than it shall, I will be free*

*Even to the uttermost, as I please, in words.*

*Katherina--- The Taming of the Shrew, William Shakespeare.*
Analytical Thinking & Civility
Creating Trust

Opening up — a March past — a Sunday day like today makes me want to hunker down. Close up + not open up. Opening up is for April days, coldly clear days, late spring days. Somewhere there’s the balance between just trying, ourselves — the need to care, wish, dream + hope, to shut up and out to life to the world.
Love is

What does the word “healing” mean to you? Can you think of an image or metaphor for it? What are some things we need healing from?

What kinds of things cause us to feel loss?

What do the words “opening up” mean to you?

“One does not love a place the less for having suffered in it, unless it has been all suffering, nothing but suffering.”

Agree or disagree?

“One Fears...”

“Life Changes in the Instant.”

There was a time...
Focusing the Workshop

Does the thesis commit the writer to a single line of argument?

Does the thesis predict the major divisions in the structure of the paper?

Is it clear, direct and concise?

Does the argument keep within the boundary set by the thesis?

Do the main points of each sentence follow logically from the thesis?

Do specific examples and details back up the main point of each paragraph?
Clarity ~ MAKE IT CLEAR!
1. Do most subjects of sentences name the cast of characters?
2. Do strong, active verbs show how those characters act?
3. Are nominalizations (abstract nouns like discovery, movement, resistance) kept to a minimum? Instead, does the writer use the verb forms (resist, discover, move)?

Cohesion ~ BEGIN WELL!
Does the beginning of each sentence connect logically to the sentence before by:
1. Beginning with the last idea in the previous sentence, or
2. Using words that place the reader in time, or
3. Using words (moreover, therefore, on the other hand) that connect the reader to the previous idea, or

Emphasis ~ END WITH A BANG!
Are endings of sentences, paragraphs, but most importantly, your papers--strong?
Is the most important or the newest information at the end of a sentence?
Is the end of each sentence, paragraph, paper -- spare and trim?
Does your conclusion end with a bang? Have you moved the information you want to stress (or newer, more difficult info) to the end?
Situating the Workshop

Class Workshop
Meet with Peer Writing Tutor.

Draft one due.

Assign paper. Discuss choice of topics.

Pre paper: on-line & class discussions

Draft two due. Meet with Professor.

Draft three due in Portfolio. Student writes reflection.

Trajectory of an Assignment
When [Brian] began writing... he was able to follow an idea to its logical conclusion... he began to focus on specific topics in an orderly manner... within 2½ weeks, he was focusing on his social and professional skills in order to assess his possibilities in alternate careers. (Pennebaker 95)
Papers 1 & 2: Personalizing the Analytical

Compare the coping method or methods used by a character (or two characters) in *Monkeys* to the coping methods you or someone you know has employed.

1. Compare your circumstance to that of one or more of the characters in Jane Austen’s *Persuasion*.
2. . . . discuss your own circumstance of change in light of the two characters from *Persuasion* that you discuss.
3. Examine the role of words, books, and letters in *Persuasion*, and compare these occurrences to a time in your own life when spoken words, books, or letters played a pivotal role in your own life.
Workshopping the Personal

1. **Subject**: What is the main subject of this essay?
2. **Slant**: How does the writer approach the subject? Does this slant interest you?
3. **Beginning**: Does the beginning grab your interest?
4. **Time and Space**: How does the writer orient the reader in time and space?
5. **Balance**: How are narrative, descriptive, expository/analytical elements used and balanced?
6. **Character**: If there are characters, are they used effectively?
7. **Detail**: Does the writer use details effectively, specifically? than in a general way? Enough--but not overkill?
8. **Center**: What is at the center of the essay? Is it material that is important to the subject and the slant?
9. **Form**: Are there mini pieces within the essay? Can you suggest a better order for the mini pieces?
10. **End**: Does the end of the essay satisfy you as a reader?
11. **Title**: After you have read the essay, consider the title. Does it still seem to fit?
12. **What’s left?** What information do you still want?
My tongue will tell the anger of my heart,
Or else my heart, concealing it, will break. . .
(Shakespeare)
Visit Writing to Heal class site:
https://segue.middlebury.edu/sites/wrpr0202a-s08
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