

WORKSHOP # 2

quoted and adapted from "Reading to Write," Nancy Koppelman & Sandy Yanonne

READING

Concepts

"Students often think reading is passive: to read is to receive information. They think that if they receive information accurately, they will be able to show evidence of same to their faculty."

"...many [students] simply react to the book. Some make a direct argument against it, or try to find the author's blind spots. Still others fear the book. They think it dares them to understand it; the book is their enemy. In either case, students set themselves up in competition with the books that read."

reading should be neither "passive nor adversarial;" we should seek a "lively relationship with books"

"students must have the ability to discern an author's message before they can write well in relation to the work. Students often must learn to use their minds differently in order to 'get' what an author is trying to tell them."

"Many students read books as if they are made up of only single words, lined up like military configuration.... They take the word as the primary building block of writing. But good readers read in phrases, looking ahead slightly and finding chains of meaning in groups of words, and then linking these groups into larger chains of meaning."

"Once students are able to absorb small ideas, they can begin to link them together in order to understand how they all bear on the large ideas that is captured in the book's title..." to do this, "students must be able to "distill a paragraph... down to its main ideas."

None of these practices are geared toward making you read faster. They are about increasing comprehension. Effective comprehension of a text requires that you perceive, as you read, the way the author has arranged the ideas to create a meaningful flow. When you begin to perceive this flow of ideas, this specific and general structure of a book, reading and comprehending it is like examining the interior of a large, ornate cathedral. Even as you stand and gaze at an array of candles or the iron reticulations of a stained-glass window, you feel yourself, and you see these details, in relation to the whole. We all experience this clarity in our reading experience when we read a favorite book for the second or third time. We say "it's different everytime... I see something I missed the first time," and so on. We read things

differently of course, because we know what is to come. As much as possible, these reading practices help us to know what is to come so that the moment of reading is more meaningful. The other lesson, of course, is that one shouldn't expect to really know a text after only one reading.



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AT HOME: Before you come to the workshop on Tuesday morning of week 2, spend some time reviewing your notes and aspects of *Uncommon Ground* that have intrigued you. Work to recall your thoughts and feelings about the book, and focus on moments in your reading when you experienced insights, moments when things seemed to come together, coalesce, synthesize. Find passages that strike you in these ways and choose one to focus on (a paragraph or so; approximately half a page). Study the passage carefully. After reading it through a few times and reviewing its context, practice reading it out loud. Don't read in a droning voice; read dramatically. Imagine you are giving a speech to a large audience. Use repetition, pauses, and tone of voice to communicate the meaning and the desired impact of the passage. Use the dictionary to clarify the meanings of any words you don't know. If the passage seems dependent on other information or ideas in the essay or in the book, identify and mark those before you come to class. You should feel very familiar with the passage and its implications when you arrive on Tuesday.

Be prepared to comment on the passage according to:

- the context of the discussion in which the passage appears
- the context of the chapter/essay/section in which the passage appears
- the context of the book as a whole

ONLY AFTER you have considered the passage from these perspectives should you define your own relationship to it (and to each of the contexts above). Do you primarily argue with the book (or with a particular aspect of the subject)? Do you question it? Agree with it? Feel disturbed by it? Why? Can you compare the book to something else you've read? Do you use the passage to try to grasp the book as a whole? Do you find yourself comparing the author's point of view with someone else's? Do you primarily wish to analyze the quote by itself and ignore its context? Why? ... There are many other ways of describing your relationship to the passage. Be aware that your relationship to it can change as you see it in light of different contexts, and your personal reaction to it may be different from your intellectual understanding. (But both are part of your relationship to it)



the WORKSHOP

in groups of 3

1. One student (the Reader) should perform his or her selected passage aloud. Then the Reader should tell the other two members of the group why the passage is important. The Reader is, in fact, teaching the others why it is important, in terms of each of the contexts listed above. The other students (the Listeners) should listen carefully and take notes. They should not have the passage in front of them. They must work only from what they hear, remember, and take notes on.
2. Now the Reader listens and takes notes while the others discuss what they heard (as if the Reader were not there). The students should do what they can to restate and shed light on what the Reader said. They should be especially concerned to discuss what seems to be the Reader's relationship, or approach toward his or her subject. Does the Reader question it? Agree with it? Seem disturbed by it... and so on (as listed above).
3. Each student takes their turn as Reader.
4. Now, based on what you have learned from listening to one another, discuss the book as a whole. What issues were highlighted by your chosen passages? Do you see any commonality in the sections you chose? Are there larger themes emerging? How did the wording of, and your reading of, the passage capture larger themes and ideas?