Reading-Life-Writing:
An Experiment in Collaborative Honors Teaching and Learning

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

By

Janice Gaylena Merritt

Thesis Advisor

Dr. Joanne H. Edmonds

Ball State University

Muncie, Indiana

Fall 2004

Expected Date of Graduation

December 2005
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract and Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Reading-Life-Writing&quot;: An Overview</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Syllabus and Its Supplements</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly Assignments</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Final Projects</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of Semester Evaluations</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendices</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I now realize that different experiences and backgrounds of both the artist and the audience create the meaning for the work.
Abstract:

This thesis examines the development and fruition of a course called "Reading-Life-Writing" that I designed and team-taught with Dr. Joanne Edmonds. The initial idea for the course grew with encouragement from Dr. Edmonds. I developed the idea during a year-long Undergraduate Fellowship under her guidance, and the entire project culminated in an Honors colloquium in the fall of 2004. This thesis begins with an introduction about the emergence and development of the idea for the course, followed by a compilation of various materials from the course, paired with my commentaries. The course materials that I have chosen for this collection include: the course syllabus and its supplements, various assignment sheets, an end of semester review, and the course evaluations. Also included are two proposals: one Dr. Edmonds and I submitted to receive the Undergraduate Fellowship, and the other for the National Collegiate Honors Council Conference, where Dr. Edmonds, Reading-Life-Writing student Emily Van Dyke, and I presented the course as a model for alternative pedagogy for Honors students across the nation. With this thesis I hope to show how Dr. Edmonds's and my teacher-student collaboration emerged as an effective pedagogical model for Honors curricula, and that the results of the course worked because of the student-teacher-student relationship, which is aligned with the interconnectedness of the course's focus: reading-life-writing.

Acknowledgements:

Every student has a "favorite" professor—someone who encouraged her, believed in her, and made her believe in herself. I am lucky and honored to call Dr. Joanne Edmonds my "favorite" professor, and wish to thank her for being my mentor and partner in this project. Thanks to my Mother and Dan, Yasmin Dalal, and Cole McGrath for their support and encouragement from the very first day I had the idea for this project. Considerable thanks to my eleven peers who stuck with me during the course. And, of course, thanks to Sylvia, who gave me the idea in the first place.
"Reading-Life-Writing"...involves a sense of history, struggle, and all the experiences that create one's life, reflected through a personal style of literature that allows others to learn from an understanding of what is written/read."
When Gaylena met Sylvia

During the 2002 fall semester, my sophomore year, I took the Honors College Critical Reader Colloquium taught by Dr. Joanne Edmonds in conjunction with Kathryn Kennison and the E.B. Ball Center. Each week we had to read a novel and write a response to our reading, which Dr. Edmonds graded. After a few weeks, I started noticing a pattern to Dr. Edmonds's comments on my responses: they all suggested that I expand certain ideas into the basis for an Honors Colloquium that she and I could team-teach. The suggestions were thrilling and flattering. A victim of poor self-esteem, I could hardly believe that Dr. Edmonds thought that I could pull off a project of that caliber. But it seems that I believe in myself the most when I am passionate about what I am doing. So when one of our Critical Reader books, The Bell Jar by Sylvia Plath, happened to be one about which I was passionate, I started believing that I actually could develop and teach an Honors colloquium—as long as Sylvia and Dr. Edmonds were involved.

I had read The Bell Jar my senior year of high school and loved it. When we read it for Critical Reader, I still loved it just as much. During my second reading, however, I empathized quite a bit more than I sympathized with the protagonist, Esther Greenwood. She was a young college student away from home; amazing opportunities had been and were continuing to be afforded to her. But still, she was not happy. She didn’t know why, and it made her even more unhappy that she was unhappy for no reason. It was a vicious cycle—one with which I had become all too familiar. I had recently been diagnosed with depression and anxiety. Obviously I was not as ill as Esther, but I felt a similar sense of hopelessness in a world that appeared to offer a lot of hope, especially from the perspective of outsiders.

I had always heard that Sylvia Plath based the character of Esther on herself, so I was intrigued to know how much Sylvia shared with what Esther said and felt. I decided to order Sylvia’s journals so I could find out for myself. It turned out that I didn’t have to; my lovely
roommate Yasmin, who had patiently listened to my meandering hypotheses about the connections between Esther and Sylvia and me, purchased the journals for me. I began my quest to get to know Sylvia, completely unaware of how much, exactly, she and her (our) illness would continue to shape my project.

Sylvia’s journals are quite amazing, and anyone who has read *The Bell Jar* would surely discover the literary delight of pairing the novel with the journals. I was instantly compelled to read more and find more connections between Sylvia and Esther. The more I read of her journals, the more I felt that I knew her, but not in a déja vu, ‘haven’t-I-met-you-before?’ sense. I was actually becoming acquainted with Sylvia, and I liked her. But as I was keenly aware, each person has a collection of different faces and different voices, and I wanted to know which face I was seeing and which voice I was hearing. In my mind, I identified two main Sylvias: one who could and wanted to move beyond her illness, and one who was already too deep into a depression and failed marriage to imagine any more hope. When I read her journals, then closed my eyes and envisioned her in different photographs in my mind, was I seeing *Sylvia*, pretty and blonde with a wide smile and sad eyes, seemingly leaping through the matte paper? Or was I seeing *Sylvia Plath*, poet extraordinaire with rounded shoulders and sad eyes sitting in the background—with Ted Hughes in the foreground? And when I heard her voice, was I hearing exuberance and promise inflected in a New England rhythm? Or was I hearing sadness and desperation with a newly acquired English cadence?

I realized that by identifying these two Sylvias, I had pinpointed why, exactly, it was that I wanted to know so much about the author of *The Bell Jar*. I liked Sylvia Plath, the author, the poet, the mentally ill persona that made her and her work so fascinating. But when thinking about the author in light of the very human Esther Greenwood, I wanted to go beyond *Sylvia Plath* the persona and meet *Sylvia*. All too often, personas lack humanity; however, humans want to connect to other humans, thus generating a (often unhealthy) fixation that creates a demand for countless tabloids,
paparazzi, and even memoirs. My quest became an effort to examine other relationships between the public personas of artists and their private inner selves via the relationships between their works of art and their memoirs and journals.

I became quite passionate about this idea, and that passion conjured up enough confidence in me to share the idea with Dr. Edmonds. She too seemed to be confident that the idea could work. So in the spring of 2003, Dr. Edmonds and I began thinking about and working on a proposal for an Undergraduate Fellowship for the following academic year.

**A (Semi-)Failed Fellowship**

What Dr. Edmonds and I proposed for the Undergraduate Fellowship and what I actually did turned out to be quite different. The proposal suggested that my fellowship would develop the project in two phases. During the first phase, I would research and study candidates for the syllabus, and during the second phase, I would journal and then turn my personal writings into a piece of art based upon the material of those entries.

The first phase began as planned; I brainstormed about possible artists and began following leads from book reviews, critical articles, works assigned in my classes, and Dr. Edmonds's suggestions. The initial results were mostly lists: lists of works, lists of artists, and lists of discussion topics. I had lists everywhere on everything. I made notes in the margins of books while I lay in bed before I drifted off to sleep, in my planner when a professor's comments during class gave me an idea, on slips of paper when my brain wandered away from the monotony of database building when I was at work. At the end of each week, I would paper clip my lists together and try to identify topics of enough importance to discuss with Dr. Edmonds during our weekly meetings. We would usually get through one of the topics before we digressed to other topics that proved to be much more fruitful than any of the ideas that I had generated on my own.
The second phase of the project strayed quite a bit from the original proposal. Due to illness, my workload had to decrease from the amount to which I had previously become accustomed. I continued to search articles and books in search of leads for possibilities for the syllabus. What changed was that I no longer had the energy physically to go meet with Dr. Edmonds, and I did not keep the daily journal for the fellowship. I had temporarily stopped working at the Honors College to make time for extra rest, and I was barely staying awake for the few hours needed to go to class and do homework; I certainly couldn’t stay awake to keep a journal. And really, those entries probably would not have been that exciting: “Got up. Went to class. Did homework. Went to bed.”

Part of me felt that I had let down Dr. Edmonds—and even myself. However, towards the end of the semester and the end of my illness, I wasn’t worried about not having completed the proposed second phase. You see, the thing about people with illnesses like depression and anxiety is that they think. They think a lot. And since I could not do much else while I was physically ill, I had loads of time to think. I began to realize that it was not necessary that I complete the second phase of the fellowship proposal, because I was confident that the idea would work. The research that I had conducted over the past year-and-a-half proved to me that most artists’ works do, in fact, reveal quite compelling connections between their personas and the inner-selves they expose in their personal writings. I was quite confident that the artists and works that Dr. Edmonds and I would choose for the colloquium’s syllabus would function effectively as pedagogical tools to convey the focus of the course to the participants. In other words, the course participants would not need my experimental work to show them how personal writings influence and shape art; rather, they would have a group of real experts to show them.
What is “Reading-Life-Writing,” anyway?

After the (semi-)failed fellowship, developing and teaching the colloquium became my senior thesis project for HONRS 499. In preparation for teaching the course in the fall of 2004, I constructed a syllabus based on a reading list that Dr. Edmonds and I built and revised (and revised, and revised again ... ), determined the guidelines for the weekly written assignments, author presentation projects, and the students’ final projects, and sketched tentative plans for each class discussion.¹

Before Dr. Edmonds and I started constructing a reading list for the syllabus, I had already been developing a strong idea about what I thought the purpose of the course should be. I deemed identifying a purpose for the course, or a course description, as a crucial first step before I (with Dr. Edmonds’s help, of course) began building the syllabus. During my fellowship, Dr. Edmonds had directed me toward the biography Virginia Woolf by Hermione Lee. Woolf was not just an author, she was also a great thinker, and the way that Lee explained how Woolf thought about writing was quite compelling. “Life-writing” was the concept of (auto)biographical writing that, Lee claimed, was Woolf’s “perpetual preoccupation” (4). Lee further explained that “[t]he life-writer must explore and understand the gap between the outer self...and the secret self” (6). This concept of “life-writing” explained the patterns in writings that I had detected during my fellowship. “Life-writing,” I thought, established a helpful framework in which my students and I could better investigate the ways in which artists wrote about their various personas.

While the concept of “life-writing” established a way for my students to study the artists’ writings, and to practice their own life-writing, it did not encompass a major aspect of the course: the reading. I felt that the reading was a crucial aspect of the course and not just because the students needed to critically read the artists’ works. I also felt that ‘reading’ was crucial to the

¹ For a more detailed commentary on the syllabus and assignments, please see the subsequent sections in this collection.
concept of the course because they would eventually need to be able to 'read' their own life-writing when they were developing their final projects—and, really, to 'read' their own lives. Thus, the purpose of the course developed into an investigation of the relationship between reading, writing, and life.

When I finally titled the course and wrote the official “course description” for the syllabus, it was important to me that I stress the relationship(s) between the three. As I explained on the syllabus:

Life-writing is appropriately hyphenated: the hyphen signifies a relationship between the two. Neither of the concepts is emphasized, which, in turn, emphasizes the importance of the connection between the two. Reading-Life-Writing expands the relationship to include not only the reading of writing, but also the ‘reading’ of life. This course is designed to look at the relationships formed when an artist’s life-writing and subsequent exposition of self affect one’s reading of the artist’s work.²

I am happy to report that the coursework, my students, and I maintained and utilized the theoretical structure of “Reading-Life-Writing” throughout the entire semester. I think the nature of the weekly assignments and the final projects were the most effective tools in keeping the structure in place. One of the final exercises for the course was a list of twenty-one questions for the students to answer,³ and one of the questions I posed was, “What is ‘Reading-Life-Writing,’ and how did we practice it?” For this particular question, it was important to me, after an entire semester of “Reading-Life-Writing,” to see how well the students understood the concept, and hopefully, to see how they had expanded their own understandings of the relationships. Some of the other questions were my own personal curiosities and a way for me to compare what I learned with what my peers had learned. While most of the answers contained some kind of rewording of the course description, some of them illustrated a deep understanding of reading-life-writing and demonstrated that the students had actually learned something. I have selected some of my students’ musings, and

² A copy of the syllabus can be found in the Syllabus section of this collection.
³ A list of these questions can be found in the End of Semester Evaluations section of this collection.
the selections can be found on the title page to each section of this collection—please pay special attention to them.

In addition to my students' achievements and their skillful handling of the course, I also succeeded in implementing the project. Throughout the semester, my autonomy in directing the course grew. I went from asking Dr. Edmonds to proofread multiple drafts of simple email messages to the students, to sending them detailed assignments in messages she never saw. I went from biting my nails and nervously looking into the faces of my eleven students if Dr. Edmonds was a few minutes late for a class session, to conducting hours of class on my own when she would go out of town. And at the end of the semester, the students assessed my performance as the sole instructor in the course evaluations. Now that the project is finished, I am proud to call "Reading-Life-Writing" my class. I do, however, attribute much of the success to the dynamics of the student-teacher relationships that the project established. It was essentially 'my' class, but I think the fluidity of our roles as students and teachers provided various opportunities for shared ownership of the course.

My goal for the course was for each student to learn something, and I feel confident in saying that we accomplished that goal. My goal for this collection is tri-fold. First, I hope its contents demonstrate the power and potential of student-teacher collaborative projects of this nature. Secondly, I hope it illustrates the magnitude of the efforts that the students put into the course (Dr. Edmonds and myself included). And thirdly, I hope this collection speaks to its audience's own ideas of the relationships between reading, writing, and life. Ideally, readers of this collection will be compelled to learn more about art, artists, and themselves.
“Reading-Life-Writing’ is an entire awareness, involvement, and incorporation of art into yourself. It is taking in all that you can around you, studying it, questioning it, absorbing it.”

Course Syllabus and Its Supplements
Syllabus Building 101

Building the reading list and deciding what types of assignments to include on the syllabus were probably the most demanding tasks throughout the entire development and implementation of this project. Dr. Edmonds and I wanted to pick the best examples of artists that link their personal lives closely to their work. But as I have already mentioned, we were keenly aware of the ‘double consciousness,’ to use W.E.B. DuBois’s term, of every individual, especially public figures; therefore, defining who the “best” examples were proved to be quite challenging.

Based on my research during the fellowship and recommendations by Dr. Edmonds, we sketched together a tentative reading list. Then, we critically examined the list we had just compiled. We looked for connecting themes between the artists and what each artist might bring to the syllabus to demonstrate a particular point we wanted to make about the connections between personal writings and art. After hours of deliberation and careful consideration, we put together a list of twelve authors. The choice of twelve authors was made rather deliberately. There were twelve students participating in the course, myself included. Thus, each student could serve as the course ‘expert’ for an individual author after he or she had completed the necessary research for Author Presentations.⁴

At this point, it may seem that the hard part was over. But believe it or not, I actually found the next step in the process the most excruciating: determining the order of the artists. Some of them made sense; of course Thomas Pynchon and J.D. Salinger should go together. However, some decisions were quite difficult. Where in the world does one teach Kurt Cobain in relation to Virginia Woolf, Ralph Ellison, and Pablo Picasso? Basically, we strung together the artists with some of the motifs we had identified when we had initially determined the reading list: mental illnesses, attempted (and/or successful) suicides, traumatic experiences, (re)memory, and the issue of

⁴ See more about the Author Presentations in the “Weekly Assignments” section of this collection.
broader cultural reflections, to name a few. The order we decided upon was: Sylvia Plath (the course was, after all, a token of her inspiration), Tim O’Brien, Vincent van Gogh, Kurt Cobain, Virginia Woolf, Thomas Pynchon and J.D. Salinger, Ralph Ellison, Frida Kahlo, Toni Morrison, Pablo Picasso, and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha. I was quite pleased with the selection of artists, their works, and the order. I thought they were all conducive to the pedagogical goals I had of collaborative and multimedia learning.

Once we had determined the reading list and order, our next step was to decide on the goals and expectations that we wanted the syllabus to outline. Since I was relatively new to syllabus building, this is another area where I greatly appreciated and needed Dr. Edmonds’s help. This was also a time when my dreams of collaborative learning started becoming realized. When mulling over what, exactly, we wanted the syllabus to say, Dr. Edmonds and I brought both of our unique classroom experiences and roles to the table: hers as professor, and mine as student. These different perspectives proved to be quite valuable; she could tell me what she expects from students, and I could tell her what students expect from their courses and professors. For example, I found it crucial that we work out and include on the syllabus a point value system for each assignment; as a student, I know how important is it to be able to track one’s performance in a course. In a different instance, Dr. Edmonds explained to me the value of having an attendance policy that clearly mandated attendance at each class session, but that allowed for due flexibility and fairness.

Deciding on what kinds of exercises we thought the course should entail was, I think, the easiest part of syllabus construction.\(^5\) Using the idea from the Undergraduate Fellowship of generating a piece of art from personal writings, we identified the need for weekly personal writing assignments and a cumulative final project based on those writings. Also, to make sure that the

---

\(^5\) Please refer to the “Weekly Assignments” section for more detailed commentary.
students were reading the assigned texts, we decided that weekly responses to the texts and presentations were necessary.

There were two exceptions to the weekly writings when we studied Vincent van Gogh and Thomas Pynchon and J.D. Salinger. For these weeks, we planned for creative writing assignments conducive to the lessons of the particular artists. For example, since the van Gogh readings were exclusively letters, we deemed it appropriate for the students to engage in their own letter writing. And since it is quite difficult to acquaint oneself with Pynchon and Salinger given their elusive natures, we devised a "speculation" assignment in which the students would attempt to master the rhetoric and form of Pynchon in a pseudo-journal entry.

Our next task was to determine the specific guidelines for the three weekly assignments: Personal Journals, Reading Responses, and the Author Presentations. Here, again, Dr. Edmonds and I combined our expectations and preconceived notions that we both had for our courses to create the "Guidelines and Suggestions" series of handouts. For these handouts, the collaboration was especially helpful. As a student, I only knew what kind of assignments worked for me; as a teacher, Dr. Edmonds knew what kind of assignments had worked in her previous courses.

The "Guidelines and Suggestions for Personal Journals" handout is pretty vague, but Dr. Edmonds and I felt that it had to be since it was a set of instructions for subjective assignments. Besides specifying the logistics of the assignments (word count, due dates, et cetera), the only criterion the handout mandated was that the students remember that the success of their final projects hinged on the content of their weekly personal journals.

Dr. Edmonds and I spent more time sketching out the "Guidelines and Suggestions for Reader Responses." We were both aware that the nature of this type of assignment requires critical examination of texts. And while we both had confidence that a group of Honors students were

---

6 Please refer to "The Final Projects" section for more detailed commentary on the particular assignment.
more than capable of being critical, we felt that it was important to clearly explain our expectations for the assignments, especially because the students in the course came from a range of disciplines that may not require critical examination of artistic texts. We decided that the most important standard for the Reader Responses was that they demonstrate "thoughtful engagement" with the texts.

The "Guidelines and Suggestions for Author Presentations" took a while for us to finalize. The assignment had many facets and it was crucial to the effectiveness of the course. The function of the presentations was to generate an expert for each artist to whom we could turn throughout the semester for quick facts and scholarly advice. The danger of the assignment was that the presentations could have become biographical sketches, leaving them practically useless to a group of critics. Thus, we decided that the presentations needed to be rooted in the broader social and historical contexts of the artists' lives so that everyone might better understand how and why they wrote and created art.

As arduous as it was, I found syllabus building to be an invaluable exercise. It was incredibly rewarding, and not just because it made the initial idea and the research tangible. As a student, I had not realized how hard a professor must work to produce a syllabus that is student and teacher friendly and that remains true to the essence of one's scholastic endeavor. Constructing a syllabus demands tremendous and provocative thought. I had to consider the students' wishes, the feasibility of the course's demands, how the course material would flow, and, most importantly, how well the syllabus upheld and ensured the success of my initial idea. Once we had finalized the syllabus, I felt confident that it mapped a successful and worthwhile course. Perhaps more important, to me personally, the syllabus was a manifestation of the vision of what I had hoped the course would be functionally, and as a scholarly pursuit for myself and the other students.
HONRS 390E: Reading-Life-Writing

Tuesday/Thursday 3:30-4:45 CA 105C

Joanne Edmonds - jedmonds@bsu.edu, 285-1024
Gaylena Merritt - gaylenamerritt@hotmail.com, 282-1501

Office Hours

Joanne - Thursday 4:45-5:30; Friday 4:00-5:00; and by appointment in CA 104
Gaylena - Tuesday/Thursday 1:30-2:30ish and by appointment in CA 104

Course description

In her biography of Virginia Woolf, Hermione Lee states, "[t]he life-writer must explore and understand the gap between the outer self...and the secret self." Called a "perpetual preoccupation" of Woolf's, "life-writing" was her attempt to explore and expose her secret self; the self that was not the author or the persona, but her "damned egotistical self."

Life-writing is appropriately hyphenated: the hyphen signifies a relationship between the two. Neither of the concepts is emphasized, which, in turn, emphasizes the importance of the connection between the two. Reading-Life-Writing expands the relationship to include not only the reading of writing, but also the "reading" of life. This course is designed to look at the relationships formed when an artist's life-writing and subsequent exposition of self affect one's reading of the artist's work.

Grading

Weekly personal journals 100 points (10 @ 10 points each)
Weekly reading responses 100 points (10 @ 10 points each)
Author presentation 100 points
Creative writing assignments 40 points (2 @ 20 points each)
Final Project 200 points
Class participation 100 points
Attendance

We expect you to come to class. If you have an emergency or are ill, let us know before the class. If you are not in class, you are still responsible for getting any information presented in class (notes, handouts, etc.) and turning in assignments. Attendance can affect borderline grades.

Accommodations

If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, have emergency medical information to provide, or need special arrangements in case the building must be evacuated, please contact Dr. Edmonds for an appointment as soon as possible.

Reading Materials

You have been asked to purchase seven books. These books will be available at the Ball State Bookstore. We suggest looking online for cheaper used copies. Try amazon.com, half.com, addall.com, etc. The other reading assignments on the schedule will be handouts from us or, in some cases, websites for you to view before class.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>24 Introduction; article on artists' lives</td>
<td>26 Sylvia Plath-presentation &amp; explanation</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>31 Plath-journals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 Plath-<em>The Bell Jar</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 Tim O'Brien-<em>The Things They Carried</em></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9 O'Brien-Interviews, articles</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14 Vincent Van Gogh-Selected letters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16 Vincent Van Gogh-Selected paintings LETTER DUE</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>21 Kurt Cobain-Selected journals</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23 Kurt Cobain-Reviews, lyrics, performances</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>28 Virginia Woolf-Selections from <em>A Writer's Diary</em> &amp; Hermione Lee</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30 Virginia Woolf-Selections from <em>The Hours</em></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Sunday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>5 Thomas Pynchon (The Crying of Lot 49)/ J. D. Salinger (short story) (See below)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7 Thomas Pynchon/ J. D. Salinger Speculation assignment due</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>12 Ralph Ellison- Prologue &amp; Epilogue from Invisible Man</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14 Ralph Ellison- Selections from Trading Twelves, Shadow and Act</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 FALL BREAK!!</td>
<td>19 FALL BREAK!!</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21 NO CLASS Project day/ conferences</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>26 Frida Kahlo- Excerpts from The Diary of... and art</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28 Frida Kahlo- Continued discussion, &amp; clips from Frida</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students must have either met with Dr. Edmonds or Gaylena or turned in a written project proposal by Tuesday the fifth.
# November 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Toni Morrison- <em>Beloved</em></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 Toni Morrison- <em>Beloved</em></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>9 Pablo Picasso-Discussion including information on the Art Institute of Chicago</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11 Pablo Picasso-Guest speaker</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>16 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha- <em>Dictee</em></td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18 Theresa Hak Kyung Cha- <em>Dictee</em></td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>23 Abstract/feedback day</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>30 Abstract/feedback day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Thanksgiving Break**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
<th>Saturday</th>
<th>Sunday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 NO CLASS</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Project day/</td>
<td>Project conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>conferences</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Project</td>
<td>7 NO CLASS</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9 Evaluations,</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>(take a break)</td>
<td></td>
<td>party</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(EVENING)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Guidelines and Suggestions for Personal Journals

Personal journals are critical because your final project will stem from them. They must be AT LEAST 250 words in length—NO LESS, NO EXCEPTIONS. Journals must be double-spaced and have normal fonts and margins. If you would like to have a handwritten journal, legible copies may be made or you can opt to type out the entries to turn in so we don’t have to pick up your handwritten journal every week. Remember, the fate of your final project rests in the content of your journals. The journals are due EVERY THURSDAY starting on 2 September 2004. There are, however, two exceptions: 16 September and 7 October. On these days you will creative writing assignments which will replace the ‘regular’ assignments.

Here are some suggestions and ideas for the subjects of your journals:

Dreams
Memories
Your day
Something that might be life altering
Your family (for example, things we never talk about)
Something that bothers you
Follow the weekly “lessons”
- persona
- truth & trauma
Or just simply write about what’s on your mind.
**Guidelines and Suggestions for Reader Responses**

The reader responses are designed to be a gauge for how well you interact and engage with the texts. They must be AT LEAST 250 words in length - NO LESS, NO EXCEPTIONS. Reader responses must be typed, double-spaced, and have normal fonts and margins. They CANNOT be plot summaries. The reader responses are not graded according to right and wrong answers. We are looking for explanation of why/how you developed your ideas. The reader responses are due EVERY THURSDAY starting on 2 September 2004. There are, however, two exceptions: 16 September and 7 October. On these days you will have creative writing assignments which will replace the 'regular' assignments.

Here are some suggestions for your reader responses:

- Describe some connections you see with the text and something in your life
- Reflect upon your reading
- Give your opinions
- Ask yourself questions
- Answer questions the texts pose
- Grapple with yourself and the texts
Guidelines and Suggestions for Author Presentations

Each of you will give a presentation on one artist on the Tuesday we begin discussing the artist. For example, if your presentation is on Tim O'Brien, you will present on 7 September. The goal of the presentations is for you to really “get to know” at least one of the artists. After your research and presentation, you will become our resident expert about that particular artist. Your responsibility as our resident expert doesn’t end with your presentation. We will probably turn to you during other discussions to answer questions or provide insight on your author.

A brief conference with Gaylena or Dr. Edmonds is required the week before you present to discuss the focus of your presentation. The actual presentation needs to demonstrate knowledge of an established connection between the artist’s life and works. We assume you will work ahead and be prepared to be fully engaged with the artist and his work. As you research the artist, think about questions we as a class will need to answer.

Part of your presentation grade is a handout that includes the chronology of the artist’s life. It must include facts, life experiences, his/her works, and other vital information that can affect one’s understanding of the artist and his/her work. The usefulness of the handout is important because the handouts will serve as quick guides to the artists throughout the rest the semester.

The presentation must also:

- be 10-15 minutes in length
- have some sort of aid for enrichment: pictures, clips, readings of other works we aren’t reading, etc. (think about this in advance so we can reserve the HC TV, VCR, DVD player, computer cart, etc.) These aids must tell us something we’ll need to know and be relevant to the focus of your presentation.
- demonstrate the connection between the artist’s life and his/her work.
- provide pertinent historical and cultural contextual information. This information can be the focus of your presentation or on a handout detailing its relevance.

Presentation breakdown:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brief conference the week before your presentation</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The apparent usefulness of the chronology handout</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presentation delivery</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presentation, including historical and social contexts, the aids, and actual content.</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
"Reading-Life-Writing" is taking in influences, living, then writing from your experiences in a confessional or fictionalized way."
The previous section reflected on the development of the goals and guidelines for the weekly assignments, or how well we hoped they would work in *theory*. This section focuses on the success, or lack thereof, of the assignments in *practice*. Thankfully, I can report that the assignments in practice achieved, for the most part, the goals that Dr. Edmonds and I originally established for them. There are, of course, exceptions to the success of our vision. You will find that examples of the students' work are missing from the collection. I chose to omit them for a few reasons. The principle reason I decided against including the students' work is because oftentimes, even in the Reader Responses, the students included information about themselves that I think is better kept private. And secondly, the students consistently turned in excellent work, and I could not possibly choose which responses to include in this collection. Please, just trust me.

As noted, we provided the students with a list of Guidelines and Expectations for their weekly writing assignments. We also decided that we would mark each assignment according to a ten-point scale. The levels of cohesion, thoughtfulness, and connections to the text would determine how high or low we would rate each assignment.

**Developing Voices**

The weekly personal journals were quite successful, probably because the students were so familiar with the subject of the assignments—their own experiences. In retrospect, including a list of topic suggestions for the personal journal in the syllabus packet seems kind of unnecessary. Journal writing is about reflecting on life, and I knew that everyone had one. But as a student, I think it is important that we included the suggestions, because having an idea about what each assignment should entail is helpful. As a teacher, I noticed that sometimes the weaker writers in the course often relied upon the suggestions. My theory is that they were more unsure than the other students
about how to ‘translate’ their very personal reflections into entries that they were comfortable sharing with an audience (me).

The process of actually grading the personal journals was easy, and simultaneously, arduous. It was easy in that I did not need to study a referent to gauge how well the students understood the material: they were their own material. At the same time, I found it difficult, and often rather absurd, to grade the content of their lives. Since the principal rule for the journals was that the students’ provide material with which they could build their final projects, I chiefly looked for “meat.” “Meat” ranged from a particular observation in a single entry to recurring themes in multiple entries.

Just as Dr. Edmonds had noticed in my own writings two years earlier, I began to notice voices unique to each person’s journals. This observation was rewarding on two levels—academically and personally. Academically, I was glad to see that each artist does, in fact, have a unique personal voice which influences his or her public art and persona. Almost without fail, I could see pieces to their final projects developing each week. Personally, it was gratifying to have a project that was shaping up to be quite successful because the students were working to make it a success. I appreciated that they put so much thought and effort into a project about which I cared so much. The journals showed me that what was once just a scholastic endeavor was now a personal search for “self”—for all twelve of us.

**Reading Reader Responses & the Grading Game**

The reader responses, though quite constructive, proved to be more challenging for the students to produce and for me to grade. As I mentioned before, Dr. Edmonds and I were looking for the students to demonstrate “thoughtful engagement” with the texts in their reader responses. As a student learning to grade, “thoughtful engagement” as a criterion seemed almost too arbitrary
for me. But I trusted Dr. Edmonds to show me what she deemed to be "thoughtful engagement" to be. Also, after discussing my apprehension with Dr. Edmonds, she reminded me that my own work was often quite engaged with the texts that I was studying, so that spotting it in someone else's work would not be as difficult as I thought.

I got a head start on learning how to grade, because Dr. Edmonds and I had assigned a 250 word response, due on the first day of class. We sent an article titled "When Life Stories Overshadow the Creative Work of Artists" to the students. We thought that the article was a good introduction to the entire semester since it dealt with many of the issues imbedded in the course content. Initially, I was not sure if having an assignment due on the first day of class was a good idea, but I am glad that Dr. Edmonds persuaded me to do it. The assignments gave me some idea about what to expect from the students' performances throughout the semester, because I caught a glimpse of their interests, how well they engaged, and how much knowledge about the topic they were bringing to the course.

After the first class was over, I immediately read all of the responses—partly out of curiosity and mostly out of excitement. Then, I copied the responses for Dr. Edmonds so that we could look over them individually, and then compare our reactions. I was quite surprised to find that she and I had most of the same thoughts and questions about each student's response. At this point, I felt like I was quite capable of grading reader responses by myself—with Dr. Edmonds's input, of course.

With most creative endeavors, reality intervenes and from time to time clouds up our idyllic forecasts. So I was not surprised when my early confidence in grading was tested during the semester. Grading challenged me on two specific occasions: the Frida Kahlo assignment and the Toni Morrison assignment.
The first particularly difficult instance was with the content of the Frida Kahlo assignments. For the eighth week of class, we read selections from Kahlo’s diaries and examined some of her art that was relevant to the diaries. As all students and teachers know, the middle of the semester is a particularly tough time for all parties. Because of that, I think timing played a significant role in the students’ lackluster performances in their Kahlo responses—particularly because the week before we had not had class. (During the previous week, Tuesday was Fall Break, and Thursday was a no-class day reserved for conferences that we had initially built into the syllabus.) Regardless, the responses were noticeably shorter and disconnected to the text and within themselves. After I had graded all of the assignments, I was quite disappointed with the quality of work the students had turned in. But I thought maybe it was just me; like my students, I was in similar mid-semester slump, so perhaps I was just out of touch with grading. I asked Dr. Edmonds to look over the responses, and thankfully, her reaction was quite similar to mine.

We decided to give the students the option of redoing their assignments for a higher grade. I was pleased when many students decided to take the opportunity to revise their assignments, and I pleasantly surprised when they turned in their revisions. I had asked that the students also return their original graded Kahlo responses with the revised responses. On most of the responses, I saw that the students had written notes and addressed my comments and questions on their first assignments, and then synthesized their first ideas with their second efforts into much more thoughtful and engaged responses. Perhaps more than the revised assignments, the way that the students ‘conversed’ with my comments on the first assignments demonstrated committed and effective learning. So even though the first attempt at the assignment halfway failed, the entire situation was positively pedagogically thrilling.

The following week, I determined a need for a challenging assignment for the challenging reading assigned, which was Toni Morrison’s Beloved. We had initially included Beloved on the
sylabus for its extensive and beautiful content on (re)memory, and thought it would be appropriately challenging at that particular point in the semester. We were now keenly, and quite frankly, apprehensively, aware of how difficult the text would be for the students, especially after the Kahlo ‘fiasco.’ We provided the students with a journal article about the “re-memory” and asked that they follow the instructions in the assignment provided at the end of this section.

The students told me that they found the assignment difficult, and I think that, as a student, I would have, as well. Because of my own perceptions of the assignment, I think I should have expected to have trouble grading the assignment. However, I had worked with Beloved and other Morrison novels, and thought that I was capable of rating the students’ observations. I soon learned that I had overestimated my ability.

I understood the content of the students’ responses and had particular comments and questions, but when it actually came to grading the assignments, I did not feel confident that what I was asking and noticing were “teacher-caliber” observations. Since the assignment was so difficult for the students to do and for me to grade, I asked Dr. Edmonds if she would comment on the assignments and mark a number grade. I think this was a crucial point in the entire project as a whole, because it showed that even though I could effectively teach and lead a classroom, I was still a student learning just as much as the other students in the course. Also, I think this is also an instance where, if I redid the course, I would omit Beloved from the syllabus. Upon review, I think the novel is too daunting for a course of this nature, and that we may have had to dig too deeply to effectively teach the lesson about (re)memory. Also, I think that since the rest of the syllabus was so reading and writing intense, a novel like Beloved was unnecessary in the given context, perhaps even superfluous.
A Little Creativity Never Hurt Anyone

As Dr. Edmonds and I were discussing the reader responses in light of the syllabus that we had constructed, we realized that there was not much room for creativity in the weekly assignments that we had assigned. The host of artists that we were working with was notoriously creative, so it only made sense that our students study the artists and practice their techniques in an imaginative way. We decided that Vincent van Gogh and Thomas Pynchon were good choices for creative exercises because their own literary contributions were so different from the other artists we would study.

Vincent van Gogh was a prolific writer of letters. He addressed most of his correspondence to his brother, Theo. Through van Gogh, I wanted the students to read how colorfully and vividly Vincent described the process of painting to his brother. Because all of van Gogh’s ‘personal’ writings (that we would study) were meant for an audience (Theo and others), we decided that the students should practice describing their own artistic endeavors in letters that they intended to share with someone special.

I think this was a great assignment in theory, as well as in practice. These days, letter writing is too often forgotten as a meaningful way to communicate. I thought assigning the students a letter would be a hands-on way for them to understand how creative letter writing can be, while quite personal at the same time. The actual assignment (which can be found at the end of this section), was self-explanatory; the main stipulation was that the students model their letters after van Gogh’s letters. Everything from the addressee to the content needed to reflect the essence of why van Gogh wrote what he wrote.

The results of the letter writing exercise were fantastic. It seems to me that Vincent wrote to Theo because he was his most beloved and trusted confidant—and sometimes his crutch. The students chose people to write to that they, too, viewed themselves as equals with, yet sometimes
leaned on in times of need. Some people chose their mothers, some chose their brothers, and some wrote to old friends (the kind you just can’t find anymore). And, just like Vincent, the students told their dear ones what they were working on, what issues they were having with it, and what they needed from them to help them accomplish their creative and personal goals.

I very much enjoyed reading the students’ letters, because although they knew that I would reading them, it seemed they wrote them like I was never going to see them. The students obviously considered the addressee as the primary (if not only) audience for their respective letters, and I think this clearly demonstrates how audience affects the way one writes and thinks about his or her work. Because we were still virtually strangers after three weeks of class, I could tell a major difference between the way the students ‘spoke’ to those close them in contrast to the unfamiliarity between them and me. It gave me hope that we could build intimate relationships between writers (the students) and reader (me). And we certainly did. Some weeks their personal journals were almost like direct letters to me, and when that happened, I knew that I had become someone with whom they could share their fears and hopes for their personal and artistic ventures.

While Vincent van Gogh openly shared his artistic philosophy, Thomas Pynchon has provided no clues as to why and how he writes (Well, at least not publicly.). Given Pynchon’s elusive nature, some might wonder why we chose Pynchon for a course that explored the personal lives of artists. We felt that Pynchon, like J.D. Salinger, provided a model for artists in direct contrast to the other artists that we were studying whose personal thoughts influenced the way we viewed their art. Most personal information we knew about Pynchon and why he writes was almost exclusively speculation.

With Pynchon, speculation is the name of the game. The ‘personal’ writings we chose for Pynchon came from The Letters of Wanda Tinasky, a collection of letters many speculate Pynchon wrote
to a California newspaper. So I came up with an assignment in which the students would need to *speculate* about how they thought Pynchon might practice life-writing.

As difficult as I think the Morrison assignment was, I think the Pynchon speculation assignment was just as challenging and much more critically creatively demanding. However, the students' responses were overwhelmingly successful. Since all they had to work with was pure speculation, it was difficult to gauge how well the students wrote like Pynchon. As any reader of Pynchon knows, his work is tiresome, yet oddly compelling. On the surface, it is refreshingly simple; dig a little deeper and you are not sure when he'll let you stop digging. So I kept that in mind while grading the speculation assignments.

I looked for the everyday mundane—ennui at its finest. But I also expected the students to make critical observations about the activities that seemed so commonplace; I expected them to find the extraordinarily absurd in the ordinary. For the most part, the students did a great job of imagining what Thomas Pynchon does on any given day, and gazing at those activities with multifaceted vision. What I think they mastered was working backwards with the course content. By this, I mean most of our work up to this point functioned from personal to public: we learned about the artists and then about their art. With Pynchon, the students had to work just from the art and then speculate about what the personal might be like. I think this activity highlighted the fluidity of the reading-life-writing relationship and the magnitude each of these elements had on the functioning of the course.

**Resident Experts: The Author Presentations**

The Author Presentations were probably my favorite in-class component of the course. Not only did I appreciate the frames of reference the historical contexts established, I also felt the assignment allowed the collaborative learning to come full-circle. Each week a different student had
to prepare a lesson plan for his or her particular artist and effectively convey that plan, thus rendering him or her an 'official' teacher, while Dr. Edmonds and I became students.

The way the presentations worked was that each of the eleven students was paired with an artist, chosen at random. The exception was that I presented the first week on Sylvia Plath: she was the first artist, and I the twelfth student. The students had to look at what was going on around the artists during the times when they were producing their art. It was important to me that the students understood the historical and social contexts because my own background in history and literature had taught me how much artists’ art is affected by the broader world around them. The context of each artist, I thought, was crucial if we were going to begin to understand their personal lives and their personas, for example, distinguishing between Virginia and Virginia Woolf.

The presentations were successful, mostly because it was obvious that the students spent time getting to know their respective artists. For the most part, the students’ lessons considered their artists’ contexts that helped us to understand for what or whom they created art, or in many cases, against what or whom they created art. Part of the presentation grade was a chronology handout that was to detail major events in the artists’ personal lives and include pertinent social and historical information. The apparent “usefulness” of the handout was how we determined what score each student would receive. This was crucial to the establishment of each student as an “expert,” because other students would be able to refer to the handout for factual information when comparing artists, which we encouraged throughout the semester.

The most important part of each presentation was an “aid for enrichment” that highlighted an important aspect of the artist, his or her work, or the broader social context. These aids provided the chance for each presenter to dazzle the rest of us; they served as the added bonus to help each presenter demonstrate why we should study the particular artist, and why we should care. For example, one student presented on Tim O’Brien and The Things They Carried. She played film clips
from veterans of the Vietnam War describing the horrific and outrageous conditions of war and its effects on humans. The presentation about Kurt Cobain included clips from some of Cobain's most memorable music videos and performances, reminding us of why our generation cared about his persona in the first place. One student referred to magazine articles and interviews with Toni Morrison to help us to understand why (re)memory is so crucial to the African American literary tradition.

Perhaps because of the usefulness and relevance of the chronology handouts and the aids, the information provided in the presentations was usually what the students referred to when discussing specific artists in class. There was something about the added attention, and, I think, delivery from their peers that made the presented information particularly interesting and valuable. I also greatly appreciated the presentations for those reasons, and because, as I alluded to before, they aligned the reading-life-writing relationship with the teachers-students-artists relationship. In both relationships, the three elements worked together, around each other, and, sometimes, against each other, which allowed for true and effective collaborative learning.

In Retrospect

If I had the opportunity to re-teach this same course, I would without a doubt keep the same structure for the weekly assignments. The assignments were truly the manifestations of reading-life-writing. I would, however, probably lessen the number of artists that we would study. I think that some of the students became quite attached to certain artists, and I think it would be nice to see those relationships further developed. I would definitely keep Sylvia Plath, Tim O’Brien, Vincent van Gogh, Kurt Cobain, and J.D. Salinger; these artists excited the students, evident by how often the students alluded to them in writing and discussions. However, I would probably omit Virginia Woolf because the students overwhelmingly expressed their disinterest in her (Sorry, Virginia; I
think you’re an acquired taste.). I would also omit Thomas Pynchon, because, quite honestly, they just didn’t get him, and I think Salinger and his work serve the same purpose. Although I find Ralph Ellison extremely important and too often forgotten in contemporary literary studies, I think *Invisible Man* demands too much time for its (and Ellison’s) importance to be taken seriously. I also think that Frida Kahlo was not crucial to the syllabus. I think, like Salinger for Pynchon, that van Gogh functioned quite similarly; also, like Pynchon, the students didn’t really get her. I would, however, regret losing her because she is a non-white woman. Morrison, as I have mentioned, was just too difficult in the contexts of this course. As for Pablo Picasso and Theresa Hak Kyung Cha, I think they were difficult, but I also think that the contrast between the iconic nature of Picasso and the virtual anonymity of Cha helped the students understand the concept of persona in a different light.

With a smaller pool of artists, I would need to modify the objective of rendering the students as resident experts on particular artists. I think I would remedy the situation by assigning two students per artist. In that scenario, the fields of expertise could be the person writing and art of the particular artists, or even the social and historical climates. This structure would allow for more time allotted per artist and alleviate the strain of “expertise” upon each student.

Another change I also might consider making is changing title of the course to “Reading-Life-Writing-Thinking.” (We thought...a lot.)
**Van Gogh assignment:**
1. With the letters provided in class, search the internet or books for Van Gogh’s paintings that can correspond to the letters. Find a minimum of four paintings that are representative of the text of Van Gogh’s letters. Bring copies of the paintings to class with you on Thursday.

**Website suggestions:**
- Art Institute of Chicago: [www.artic.edu/](http://www.artic.edu/)
- Van Gogh Museum: [www.vangoghmuseum.nl](http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl)
- Google searches

2. Read the letters of Van Gogh provided in class. Using elements similar to Van Gogh’s write a letter to someone. (You don’t have to send it, but obviously you can if you want to.) In the letter, talk about your feelings, what you see, etc. As you look for paintings by Van Gogh that correspond to his letters, think about what your letter should say in order for it to correspond to your fiction, or final project.

Look at your previous personal journal entries and see if you see a common thread. This would be a good time to reflect and decide either to perpetuate the common thread or to break it and tell why. You don’t need to turn in Personal Journals or Reader Responses for Thursday. This letter, however, should include elements of both. And, as always, let us know if you need help.

**Morrison assignment:**
Your assignment for Thursday, November 4 is to connect, in depth, *Beloved* and Toni Morrison’s use of “re-memory” to at least two other artists & their works that we have read. Though the word minimum is 250 words, it is a minimum, and we expect you to go over for this assignment. Your personal journal entries are still due for Thursday.

Some websites you might want to check out:
  Search: *Beloved*, Toni Morrison

As always, let me know if you have any questions or concerns with the assignment.

**Pynchon assignment:**
Using today’s presentation and *The Letters of Wanda Tinasky*, create a life-writing based on speculation written from the perspective of Thomas Pynchon. In this no less than 500 word creative writing assignment, choose a format that we have seen (journal, short story, letter, conglomeration of stuff [like Cobain], etc.) and write how you think Pynchon would write.
"We no longer look at art for art's sake, we are delving deeper into the connections that are formed between art and the personal self."

The Final Projects
Clearly, the main purpose of the course was to produce fictionalized pieces of art in the form of the final projects. Each week was designed to teach specific lessons—some through osmosis—that would prepare the students to think critically and creatively about their own lives and their art. However, although the culmination of the course was for the students to create unique individual projects, it was important to me that their art also be seen, in part, as my art, as the culmination of the entire “Reading-Life-Writing” project.

The term “art” was always up for debate throughout the semester (as it often is in scholarly forums), and when it came time for the students to begin work on their “art,” some of them expressed concern. Dr. Edmonds and I always considered each of the figures that we studied in the course as “artists,” whether they were written, visual, or musical artists. Thus, it only made sense that each student create “art” out of his or her own forte. We made it clear on the handout that the project medium should represent who each student felt he or she was as a person and as an artist. 7

The entire final project consisted of six parts: a proposal, project abstract and feedback, an artist’s statement, written peer evaluations, and the physical project and presentation. The primary purpose for the six parts was to keep the students active and thoughtful regarding their projects throughout the entire semester. Dr. Edmonds and I thought of the parts as “benchmarks” to keep the students going on the grueling tracks to their objectives.

The project proposal is pretty self-explanatory. We asked that the students propose an idea for their projects, either written or in a conference. The main problem with the proposals was that the students had so many ideas, and as per the nature of life, those ideas often shifted and sometimes completely changed. This was, at the same time, exhilarating and exhausting. It was thrilling to see that the students wanted to put forth the effort to use the lessons and themes from the course to mold their personal lives into art. It was, well, less-than-thrilling when particular

---

7 Please refer to the “The Final Project” handout at the end of this section.
students changed their project ideas weekly, sometimes daily, and sometimes within a single class session.

For me, the most rewarding part of the proposal benchmark was holding individual conferences with the students to brainstorm. I think those were the times when I felt most like a "teacher" and that my opinions and ideas were valued. Also, the conferences were intense periods of collaborative learning, which was (as I have mentioned) one of my major goals for the course as a whole.

I had built two "Abstract/Feedback" days into the course syllabus. These two class sessions were for the students to share: the idea for their projects, how their projects were structured, what they were going to look like, and comments and suggestions for their peers' projects. The students chose which days they wanted to present in advance, and the day that they did not present they were to provide written feedback on the presenters' projects.

I had asked that the students be '88% finished with their projects when they presented. Obviously, this was a facetious figure. Although I expected to see that the students were well on their way to finishing their projects for the impending presentation, what I really wanted was for the students to have a finalized comprehensive structure so that their peers could provide specific and thoughtful comments and suggestions for the projects as wholes. Apparently, 88% was actually a beneficial number, because the students were able to help each other quite a great deal with their written feedback. They gave each other thorough and critical advice—often paragraphs in length—that they seemed to genuinely appreciate and consider when polishing their projects for presentation.

The fourth aspect of the project, the artist's statement, was the most important to me and (I think) Dr. Edmonds. The artist's statements were the students' chance to explain to us (and, if they chose, the presentation audience) the who, what, when, where, how, and why of their individual
projects. Who: is this project a direct reflection or clouded image of who you are as a person?
What: what, exactly, is this piece of art? When: how long did this take you? When did you get the
original idea? Where: from where did you find the inspiration and components for this project?
How: what elements did you use to create this project? And, as all responses in “Reading-Life-
Writing” required, every answer had to tell why about every facet of the project.

Dr. Edmonds initially sold me on the importance of the artist’s statement, and simply
reading our students’ own statements demonstrated to me how crucial it is for students to have a
voice to explain their work. It seems that all students appreciate the opportunity to explain
themselves and their work. Because of the personal nature of the “Reading-Life-Writing” projects, I
think it was necessary that the students explain what the projects meant in their own terms to
prevent any confusion about who the students were, and who they were as artists.

The written evaluation component of the final project was the chance for the students to
assess their peers’ work.\(^6\) The exercise was designed for them to report on how well two of their
peers synthesized the course material and the benchmarks into the final product. And, judging from
their comments, the students accomplished the objectives for the assignment. They gave insightful
and critical feedback on how well they thought the project had advanced from the abstract to the
final presentation. The evaluations also helped me to gauge the individual projects because they
noticed nuances that I may have overlooked, but that were actually quite crucial to the essence of the
artwork as a whole.

From the very beginning of the course, Dr. Edmonds and I knew how hard the students
were going to work on these projects, so we thought that they should have a chance to share their
art with an audience at an end-of-semester evening presentation. And a presentation made sense,
since, as I often forgot, the course was actually my senior thesis, as well. We envisioned the

\(^6\) See the “Final Project Evaluation” form at the end of this section.
presentation night as an opportunity for us to weave together the individual elements of the course into one giant project. From my Critical Reader journal entry to the cake and punch for the reception, all of that became “Reading-Life-Writing.”

It was rewarding to see an entire audience at the presentation to experience the splendid art the students produced. On a deeper personal level, it was gratifying to wrap up the project and publicly thank those who had helped me throughout the development and implementation of the course idea. It was, to be quite honest, the first time that I could remember in a long time that I felt proud. I was proud of my students, their work, my work, and myself. And, really, that one evening with all of those amazing people made the entire project worthwhile.
What is the final project?
The final project should be a synthesis of what you have learned in Reading-Life-Writing. The goal of the project is for you to produce a fictionalized piece of art based on your own life-writings, the weekly personal journals.

What purpose must the project serve?
The project must show a clear connection between your life-writing and your product. You can, however, resist a direct representation of yourself in the final product with justification in your artist’s statement.

What consists of the final project?
The final project will include:

- **A project proposal:** a written description of what your project will be or a conference with Gaylena or Dr. Edmonds to discuss your project by 5 October.

- **Abstract:** an oral explanation to the class on either 23 November or 30 November of your project.

- **Feedback:** your written suggestions, questions, comments, concerns, etc. for the presented abstracts on the day you don’t give your abstract.

- **An artist’s statement:** a written illustration of the path that you took to get to your final project. It should answer any questions of how and why about the product.

- **The actual project itself** (a short story, a self-portrait, songs, etc.).

- **A presentation on Monday evening, 6 December.** The point of the presentation is for you clearly explain your project to a public audience. This is your time to share your project and expose your project in a way that will provide look at your inner self.

- **Written evaluations** of others’ projects after the presentations. (More on this later.)

What can one do for his or her project?
The project medium must be representative of you. For example, although we strongly encourage everyone to paint his or her own self-portrait at some point in his or her life, we don’t want a musician painting; we want a musician’s medium to a composition, an instrument, or his or her voice. Other than that, the format of your project is up to you.

The project is broken down as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project proposal (written or conference by 5 October)</td>
<td>5 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project abstract</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project feedback</td>
<td>10 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written artist’s statement</td>
<td>25 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project and Presentation (physical project and your presentation on 6 December)</td>
<td>125 points</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written evaluations</td>
<td>25 points</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

21 October and 2 December are days for you meet with Gaylena or Joanne to discuss your project. If you don’t think you need to meet with us, don’t. Please use these days wisely; they are not ‘free’ days. You will need to use them for the projects...trust us.
Final Project Evaluation

Please evaluate the projects of your fellow classmates, ___________________ & ___________________, by answering the following questions:

1. How well did they present their projects during their respective abstract sessions? Did their projects appear to be 88% complete?

2. Did they appear to respond positively to the feedback presented during the abstract sessions? Did you notice any adjustments that they made to their final projects in light of the feedback you heard others giving them in class?

3. How well did they present their projects? Did their presentations meet all of the criteria presented on the final project handout [see below]?

4. Do their actual projects meet all of the criteria presented on the final project handout?

Any other comments for them or me?

According to the final project handout, the final project:

should be a synthesis of what you have learned in Reading-Life-Writing. The goal of the project is for you to produce a fictionalized piece of art based on your own life-writings, the weekly personal journals.

The project must show a clear connection between your life-writing and your product. You can, however, resist a direct representation of yourself in the final product with justification in your artist’s statement.

The final project presentation was supposed to:

clearly explain your project to a public audience. This is your time to share your project and expose your project in a way that will provide a look at your inner self.
One could see 'Reading-Life-Writing' this way: we read, we lived the ideas we read, and then we wrote about how those ideas applied to our lives. Or, one could see it as we read, we lived, and now others have our writings to read, live, and rewrite into their lives.
This section includes two sets of evaluations: the list of questions I alluded to in the “‘Reading-Life-Writing’ Overview” section of this collection, and the Course Evaluations administered by the Honors College. I have included each student’s Course Evaluation, but I did not include the responses to the questions that I posed to the students. I decided not to include all of their answers because some of them were quite personal, and I would like to keep the honesty and openness between my students and me.

Evaluations at the end of Fall Semester 2004 were bittersweet. It is always refreshing to finish a project—especially when that project is a class that you are either teaching or taking. In the case of “Reading-Life-Writing,” however, it was hard for me to realize that all that I had worked for for two years was over, and that I was probably going to lose contact with eleven of the most extraordinary people I had met at Ball State. But, as much as I despise clichés (They are, however, often quite true, yet not profound, aren’t they?), all good things really do have to end. The end of “Reading-Life-Writing” promised that there future projects for my peers and me to tackle and succeed; and when it is all said and done, that’s enough, isn’t it?
Assignment for Thursday, November 18:
In addition to a Journal & Reader Response to *Dictee*, you need to respond to the following questions as honestly as you possibly can (the "Why?"/ "Why not?" after all of them is implied 😊):

1. What was/is your favorite part of this class?
2. What was/is your least favorite part of this class?
3. What is the most important thing you've learned as a result of this class?
4. What would you change about your performance in the class?
5. Who in the class do you feel contributed the most to meaningful discussions?
6. Who do you think had the most differing opinions to your own?
7. Which artist presentation was your favorite?
8. Which person made you laugh the most?
9. Which person's opinion did you appreciate the most, whether or not you agreed?
10. Who is your favorite artist that we studied?
11. Who is your least favorite artist that we studied?
12. Do you look at art and/or artists (visual & written) differently after this course?
13. What is "Reading-Life-Writing" and how did we practice it?
14. How do explain the class to outsiders? (Yes, outsiders-we are an elite group…obviously.)
15. Who would you have added to the syllabus?
16. Who would you have omitted from the syllabus?
17. What one thing do you want to know about me?
18. What one thing do you want me to know about you?
19. Are you excited about your project?
20. Are you excited about our presentation?
21. Anything else you want to tell me?
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number Honor 390E Sect 1
Instructor’s Name Gaylera Merritt

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate “yes” or “no” and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ☑ No ☐

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

"Diette rocked. My face off!"
I thought the texts were good & interesting.
I thought that a journal & response was a lot perhaps a response every week & journal every other week would have been better."
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number: Honors 390E - 1
Instructor's Name: Merritt

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate "yes" or "no" and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes [ ] No [ ]

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

I loved this course—probably one of the best I've ever taken at BSU. I learned so much about the authors/artists we studied as well as about people in general—and myself! The course was really fun. I loved our discussions it felt like I got to know the people in the class. I enjoyed the presentations each week, greatly enjoyed keeping a journal. The final projects were the best part. I loved seeing everyone's projects. Mine is one I want to keep forever. Gaylana showed so much interest in us, which means so much. I loved the class & the instructor!!!
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number: __________________________

Instructor's Name: __________________________________

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate “yes” or “no” and include any comments on this sheet:

Yes ○ No ○

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

I have learned so much from the class. I signed up for it because I thought it was going to be about VISUAL ARTISTS. It really wasn't very much, and I have never enjoyed reading or analyzing literature... This class showed me that there are writers I enjoy! Sometimes I felt that Goethe came across like he knew 100,000 more than us, however, she was an amazing prof! Great class overall!
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate “yes” or “no” and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!
HONORS COLLEGE  
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM  
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number  

Instructor's Name  

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evalulative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate “yes” or “no” and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ☐ 

No ☐

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!
Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate "yes" or "no" and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ● No ○

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

- I enjoyed the required readings because they were topics I would never have read on my own.

- I also enjoyed that the class centered on discussion because the class participated in the discussion, and interesting ideas were participated.

- Literature was very enjoyable and knowledgeable of the authors and subjects we studied.
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number

Instructor's Name

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate "yes" or "no" and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ○ No ○

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

This course was probably the best honors course I have taken. It had a perfect balance of reading, writing, & discussion. The content was interesting & relevant. Gaylene was very knowledgeable about the eras/periods and her research really showed. The final project was a bit...
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number  
HONRS 390 E Ser.1

Instructor's Name  
Gaylene Merritt

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate "yes" or "no" and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes O  No O

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

The course pushed me to learn more about myself than I thought I should. Gaylene provided an chance to make the course mean as much as we wanted. It meant a lot more than mere credit.
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number
Instructor's Name

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate “yes” or “no” and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

Class was great. Definitely the best Honors course I've ever taken.
Problem book but fine.
Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate “yes” or “no” and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes 0 No 0

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!
HONORS COLLEGE
STUDENT EVALUATION FORM
WRITTEN COMMENTS

Course and Section Number

Instructor's Name

Please fill out the information above. This sheet is to be used for all written, evaluative comments. These forms will be returned to the instructor after grades have been turned in. Copies will be kept in the Honors College.

Were the procedures for administering evaluations carried out properly? Please indicate "yes" or "no" and include any comments on this sheet.

Yes ☐ No ☐

Comments: Please write your comments about the course in the space below. You may comment on any aspect of the course you found either interesting, controversial, or well or poorly done. You might comment on the texts used; were they appropriate and worth buying, adequately covered? You might have something to say about the pace of the course. In short, comment on anything related to the class that you wish, but please do comment!

[Handwritten comments]

I think the course was very interesting and well taught.
I enjoyed the course very much. It helped me in understanding the subject better.
We had great discussions in class.
“'Reading-Life-Writing' is moving forward, learning from the past, knowing where you want to go, what you want to now practice and produce, what you want to make or do that represents yourself.”
Circle Semester Requested (maximum of two):

- FALL 2003
- SPRING 2004
- SUMMER 2004

One of the tasks of The Honors College in the operation of the Undergraduate Fellows Program is to serve as a “clearinghouse” to match the interests and abilities of potential Fellows with project proposals of Faculty Mentors. To that end it will help if you complete this form, in order that we may have it on file. You may, of course, update the form as many times as you wish.

If you are selected to be a Fellow, we shall contact you immediately and give you information about the Faculty Mentor with whom you may be working. **NOTE:** Completing this form is **not** a guarantee of selection. In addition, any research project undertaken as a Fellow using animal or human subjects must conform to Ball State University regulations regarding such research.

If you are selected to be a Fellow, it is your responsibility to inform the Honors College if you have another job on campus. This is so that we may inform Payroll and Human Resources. You also agree, if accepted, to participate in at least one group discussion of your project with other Undergraduate Fellows.

**PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE**

**NAME** Janice Gaylene Merritt

**BSU ID #**

**BSU MAILING ADDRESS** 385 Davidson Hall

**PHONE** 214-2934 **E-MAIL** gaylenemerritt@hotmail.com

**HOME ADDRESS** 531 Third Street, Shelbyville, Indiana 46176

**PHONE** 317-398-3168

**MAJOR** English Literature **MINOR** French, History, Humanities

**OVERALL GPA** (Min. 3.33) 4.0 **HOURS Earned** (Min. 30) 61

**WORK AND/OR RESEARCH EXPERIENCE**

Honors 100 Mentor, Honors Advising Student

Assistant, Virginia Ball Center Scholar

**TYPE OF WORK YOU WOULD PREFER TO DO AS A FELLOW OR THE MENTOR WITH WHOM YOU WISH TO WORK**

I would like to work with Dr. Joanne Edmonds.

**SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT** Janice Gaylene Merritt **DATE** 24 March 2003

Return to: James S. Ruebel, Dean
Honors College -- Carnichael Hall, Room 104

**Deadline:** This form may be placed on file at any time; applications for specific projects are due March 24, 2003.
During Fall Semester 2002, I took the Critical Reader Colloquium with Dr. Joanne Edmonds. On one of my journal entries Dr. Edmonds made the comment that the style of the entry was "vintage Gaylena." Soon after, our class read *The Bell Jar* by Sylvia Plath, and I began reading *The Unabridged Journals of Sylvia Plath*. One entry contains a line that Plath simply pulled and entered verbatim into the text of *The Bell Jar*. With this similarity and other discussions about the narrator in the novel, I began exploring similarities and differences between Sylvia Plath and her narrator Esther Greenwood. At times in the novel, Sylvia and Esther are indistinguishable; likewise, it is hard to not think about Esther when reading Plath's journal entries. It struck me that Plath's fiction writing style and memoir writing style were strikingly similar; "vintage Esther" was essentially "vintage Sylvia." I expanded this theory when reading other fiction, asking myself, "How much of this is autobiographical?"

Discovering that I could ask this question about most fiction, I began wondering to what extent authors include their personal memoirs in their fiction writing. My next question was, "What would I do to my life if I turned it into fiction?" In her journals, Plath stated,

Some things are hard to write about. After something happens to you, you go to write it down, and either you overdramatize it or underplay it, exaggerate the wrong parts or ignore the important ones. At any rate, you never write it quite the way you want to. (10)
With Plath's idea in mind, I decided that I wanted to turn aspects of my own life into fiction, and I wanted to see if this phenomenon would work in other amateur authors' writings. If awarded an Undergraduate Fellowship, I plan to research memoirs and fiction of different authors to see how well the phenomenon continues. After a semester of identifying authors, collecting related articles, and reading the novels and memoirs of the authors, I plan to record my own life in a series of journals. At the end of the second semester, I will take my journals and turn them into a fictional story of my life using Plath's principle of recording life events.

This project will then become the basis of an Honors colloquium implementing my research from the first semester and my own writing experiences. The students will use the articles, novels, memoirs, and their own detailed journals to turn their own lives into fictional stories. I expect my students and myself to discover surprising things about our personalities, some of which may be alarming. The research, my written project, and the colloquium will form the components of my Senior Honors Thesis.
HONORS UNDERGRADUATE FELLOWS PROGRAM

FACULTY MENTOR APPLICATION

Circle Semester Requested:

FALL 2003  SPRING 2004  SUMMER 2004

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE

NAME Joanne Edwards  TITLE Associate Dean

DEPARTMENT Honors College  CAMPUS PHONE 51775

CAMPUS ADDRESS CA 104  HOME PHONE 284 7284

PROPOSAL TITLE Memoirs and Fiction: Exploring, Writing, and Teaching

REQUESTED UNDERGRADUATE

NAME Gayla var Merritt

MAJOR English  MINOR French, History, Humanities  GPA 4.0 (3.33 minimum)

DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

Using no more than two typewritten pages, specify the nature of the project to be undertaken and of the work the Honors Undergraduate Fellow would do. Please try, as much as possible, to write your description in "bright layman's language" to facilitate the committee's evaluations. Please include appropriate details with specific figures if you are requesting expense funding to a limit of $300.00. Approved expenses will be funded only by reimbursement, through University purchase orders, or direct purchase by the Honors College.

NOTE: It is expected that research using animal or human subjects will conform to Ball State University policies and regulations regarding such research.

SIGNATURE OF FACULTY MEMBER Joanne Edwards  DATE 24 Mar. 03

Return to: Dr. James S. Ruebel, Dean
Honors College -- Carmichael Hall, Rm. 104
Deadline: March 25, 2003, 5:00 PM
Undergraduate Fellowship Application
Gaylena Merritt, Fellow
Joanne Edmonds, Faculty Mentor

In her application for an Undergraduate Fellowship, Gaylena Merritt has proposed what is in many ways a dream project for her. After researching connections between the memoirs and fiction of selected writers, she will use her own journals as a source for a piece of autobiographical fiction. From that foundation, she will design an Honors colloquium that takes Honors students through the same process of reading, reflecting, journaling, and creating fiction.

This is an ambitious project and one Gaylena is well qualified to undertake. As a student in the "Conversations Course" at the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry, she was part of a group of 12 selected freshmen who read and wrote about "crucial" texts and spin-offs of over 100 writers from Homer onwards. Gaylena, a freshman when she began the course, was an upperclassman in insight and experience at its conclusion. The following semester, as a student in the Critical Reader Colloquium, she continued to refine her skills as a reader and writer. In her weekly journals, responses to the assigned reading, one could hear her developing and distinctive writer's voice.

Gaylena also has had experiences that promise well for the teaching component of the proposed project. Evaluations of her work as an Honors 100 mentor show that she interacted effectively with the freshmen in her section. She has further developed this ability as an advising student assistant for Adrienne Jones. In both situations, she has been given responsibility for individual preparation and research as well as teaching/advising.

Gaylena's overall project is one that fits well with my own teaching and research interests. I have taught a Critical Reader Colloquium on memoirs and fiction and have investigated the connections between the diaries and fiction of Barbara Pym as well as between the Writer's Notebook and major novels of Anthony Powell. I advised Matt Burden's thesis on autobiography in Virginia Woolf's fiction and non-fiction and mentored Jennifer Gibson during preparations for her "thesis colloquium."

I am therefore certain that I could be a useful mentor for Gaylena. More importantly, I am equally certain that she herself is well equipped to complete a first-rate project, one that will be genuinely valuable for her and for the students who will enroll in her colloquium.
"Reading-Life-Writing" Presentation Proposal
National Collegiate Honors Council Conference
St. Louis, Missouri
October xx-xx, 2005

"Reading-Life-Writing" was an Honors colloquium two years in the making. Under the direction of Dr. Joanne Edmonds, Associate Dean of the Honors College, Ball State University student Gaylena Merritt researched the lives and works of various artists. The product was a literature-based course in which 11 Honors students studied the personal writings (journals, memoirs, letters, interviews, etc.) of twelve artists. Artists included Sylvia Plath, Tim O'Brien, Frida Kahlo, and Ralph Ellison, among others. The students submitted weekly journals and reader responses. The culmination of the course was each student creating a piece of art, visual, written, and both, integrating material studied throughout the course.

The presentation of the course will be Joanne and Gaylena's journey through the artists' lives, from the initial idea to the end of the course, designing the course itself, and the structure of the working course. Issues such as the pedagogical rewards of a professor/student relationship, the results of a course based primarily on student led discussion, and the values of such a course within an Honors curriculum will be addressed.
"Reading-Life-Writing' is incorporating what you read into your life and your life into your writing."


