MIKE ROSE

"I Just Wanna Be Average"

Born to immigrant Italian parents in 1944, Mike Rose is an outstanding scholar and teacher, known especially for his autobiographical book on the school experiences of America's underclass, Lives on the Boundary *(1989). "I Just Wanna Be Average," a chapter from that book, shows the terrifying ways students can slip through the cracks in the educational system. Rose also shows, however, that there is hope for the individual lucky enough to encounter a caring teacher and to find the motivation to actively pursue learning both in and out of school.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

Do you see yourself (or perhaps a close friend or sibling) as having had a "label" during your school years? For instance, did your teachers or classmates see you (or your friend or sibling) as the class clown, the brain, or the quiet one? In what ways was this label fitting? What might a teacher have missed because of this label?

2.

Describe your attitude toward school during your high school years. What interested you? What did school mean to you? What were your best moments? Your worst?

3.

If you could go back and change anything about your past educational experiences, what would you change? How? Why?

It took two buses to get to Our Lady of Mercy. The first started deep in South Los Angeles and caught me at midpoint. The second drifted through neighborhoods with trees, parks, big lawns, and lots of flowers. The rides were long but were livened up by a group of South L.A. veterans whose parents also thought that Hope had set up shop in the west end of the country. There was Christy Biggars, who, at sixteen, was dealing and was, according to rumor, a pimp as well. There were Bill Cobb and Johnny Gonzales, grease-pencil artists extraordinaire, who left Nembutal-enhanced swirls of "Cobb" and "Johnny" on the corrugated walls of the bus. And then there was Tyrrell Wilson. Tyrrell was the coolest kid I knew. He ran the dozens like a metric halfback, laid down a rap that outrhymed and outpointed Cobb, whose rap was good but not great—the curse of a moderately soulful kid trapped in white skin. But it was Cobb who would sneak a radio onto the bus, and thus underwrote his patter with Little Richard, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry, the Coasters, and Ernie K. Doe's mother-in-law, an awful woman who was "sent from down below." And so it was that Christy and Cobb and Johnny G. and Tyrrell and I and assorted others picked up along the way passed our days in the back of the bus, a funny mix brought together by geography and parental desire.

Entrance to school brings with it forms and releases and assessments. Mercy relied on a series of tests, mostly the Stanford-Binet, for placement, and somehow the results of my tests got confused with those of another student named Rose. The other Rose apparently didn't do very well, for I was placed in the vocational track, a euphemism for the bottom level. Neither I nor my parents realized what this meant. We had no sense that Business Math, Typing, and English-Level D were dead ends. The current spate of reports on the

schools criticizes parents for not involving themselves in the education of their children. But how would someone like Tommy Rose, with his two years of Italian schooling, know what to ask? And what sort of pressure could an exhausted waitress apply? The error went undetected, and I remained in the vocational track for two years. What a place.

My homeroom was supervised by Brother Dill, a troubled and unstable man who also taught freshman English. When his class drifted away from him, which was often, his voice would rise in paranoid accusations, and occasionally he would lose control and shake or smack us. I hadn't been there two months when one of his brisk, face-turning slaps had my glasses sliding down the aisle. Physical education was also pretty harsh. Our teacher was a stubby ex-lineman who had played old-time pro ball in the Midwest. He routinely had us grabbing our ankles to receive his stinging paddle across our butts. He did that, he said, to make men of us. "Rose," he bellowed on our first encounter; me standing geeky in line in my baggy shorts. "'Rose'? What the hell kind of name is that?"

"Italian, sir," I squeaked.

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"Italian! Ho. Rose, do you know the sound a bag of shit makes when it hits the wall?"

"No, sir."

"Wop!"

Sophomore English was taught by Mr. Mitropetros. He was a large, bejeweled man who managed the parking lot at the Shrine Auditorium. He would crow and preen and list for us the stars he'd brushed against. We'd ask questions and glance knowingly and snicker, and all that fueled the poor guy to brag some more. Parking cars was his night job. He had little training in English, so his lesson plan for his day work had us reading the district's required text, *Julius Caesar,* aloud for the semester. We'd finish the play way before the twenty weeks was up, so he'd have us switch parts again and again and start again: Dave Snyder, the fastest guy at Mercy, muscling through Caesar to the breathless squeals of Calpurnia, as interpreted by Steve Fusco, a surfer who owned the school's most envied paneled wagon. Week ten and Dave and Steve would take on new roles, as would we all, and render a water-logged Cassius and a Brutus that are beyond my powers of description.

Spanish I—taken in the second year—fell into the hands of a new recruit. Mr. Montez was a tiny man, slight, five foot six at the most, soft-spoken and delicate. Spanish was a particularly rowdy class, and Mr. Montez was as prepared for it as a doily maker at a hammer throw. He would tap his pencil to a room in which Steve Fusco was propelling spitballs from his heavy lips, in which Mike Dweetz was taunting Billy Hawk, a half-Indian, half-Spanish, reed-thin, quietly explosive boy. The vocational track at Our Lady of Mercy mixed kids traveling in from South L.A. with South Bay surfers and a few Slavs and Chicanos from the harbors of San Pedro. This was a dangerous miscellany: surfers and hodads and South-Central blacks all ablaze to the metronomic tapping of Hector Montez's pencil.

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One day Billy lost it. Out of the corner of my eye I saw him strike out with his right arm and catch Dweetz across the neck. Quick as a spasm, Dweetz was out of his seat, scattering desks, cracking Billy on the side of the head, right behind the eye. Snyder and Fusco and others broke it up, but the room felt hot and close and naked. Mr. Montez's tenuous authority was finally ripped to shreds, and I think everyone felt a little strange

about that. The charade was over, and when it came down to it, I don't think any of the kids really wanted it to end this way. They had pushed and pushed and bullied their way into a freedom that both scared and embarrassed them.

Students will float to the mark you set. I and the others in the vocational classes were bobbing in pretty shallow water. Vocational education has aimed at increasing the economic opportunities of students who do not do well in our schools. Some serious programs succeed in doing that, and through exceptional teachers—like Mr. Gross in *Horace's Compromise*—students learn to develop hypotheses and troubleshoot, reason through a problem, and communicate effectively—the true job skills. The vocational track, however, is most often a place for those who are just not making it, a dumping ground for the disaffected. There were a few teachers who worked hard at education; young Brother Slattery, for example, combined a stern voice with weekly quizzes to try to pass along to us a skeletal outline of world history. But mostly the teachers had no idea of how to engage the imaginations of us kids who were scuttling along at the bottom of the pond.

And the teachers would have needed some inventiveness, for none of us was groomed for the classroom. It wasn't just that I didn't know things—didn't know how to simplify algebraic fractions, couldn't identify different kinds of clauses, bungled Spanish translations—but that I had developed various faulty and inadequate ways of doing algebra and making sense of Spanish. Worse yet, the years of defensive tuning out in elementary school had given me a way to escape quickly while seeming at least half alert. During my time in Voc. Ed., I developed further into a mediocre student and a somnambulant problem solver, and that affected the subjects I did have the wherewithal to handle: I detested Shakespeare; I got bored with history. My attention flitted here and there. I fooled around in class and read my books indifferently—the intellectual equivalent of playing with your food. I did what I had to do to get by, and I did it with half a mind.

But I did learn things about people and eventually came into my own socially. I liked the guys in Voc. Ed. Growing up where I did, I understood and admired physical prowess, and there was an abundance of muscle here. There was Dave Snyder, a sprinter and halfback of true quality. Dave's ability and his quick wit gave him a natural appeal, and he was welcome in any clique, though he always kept a little independent. He enjoyed acting the fool and could care less about studies, but he possessed a certain maturity and never caused the faculty much trouble. It was a testament to his independence that he included me among his friends—I eventually went out for track, but I was no jock. Owing to the Latin alphabet and a dearth of *R*s and *S*s, Snyder sat behind Rose, and we started exchanging one-liners and became friends. There was Ted Richard, a much-touted Little League pitcher. He was chunky and had a baby face and came to Our Lady of Mercy as a seasoned street fighter. Ted was quick to laugh and he had a loud, jolly laugh, but when he got angry he'd smile a little smile, the kind that simply raises the corner of the mouth a quarter of an inch. For those who knew, it was an eerie signal. Those who didn't found themselves in big trouble, for Ted was very quick. He loved to carry on what we would come to call philosophical discussions: What is courage? Does God exist? He also loved words, enjoyed picking up big ones like *salubrious* and *equivocal* and using them in our conversations—laughing at himself as the word hit a chuckhole rolling off his tongue. Ted didn't do all that well in school—baseball and parties and testing the

courage he'd speculated about took up his time. His textbooks were *Argosy* and *Field and Stream*, whatever newspapers he'd find on the bus stop—from the *Daily Worker* to pornography—conversations with uncles or hobos or businessmen he'd meet in a coffee shop, *The Old Man and the Sea*. With hindsight, I can see that Ted was developing into one of those rough-hewn intellectuals whose sources are a mix of the learned and the apocryphal, whose discussions are both assured and sad.

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And then there was Ken Harvey. Ken was good-looking in a puffy way and had a full and oily ducktail and was a car enthusiast . . . a hodad. One day in religion class, he said the sentence that turned out to be one of the most memorable of the hundreds of thousands I heard in those Voc. Ed. years. We were talking about the parable of the talents, about achievement, working hard, doing the best you can do, blah-blah-blah, when the teacher called on the restive Ken Harvey for an opinion. Ken thought about it, but just for a second, and said (with studied, minimal affect), "I just wanna be average." That woke me up. Average? Who wants to be average? Then the athletes chimed in with the clichés that make you want to laryngectomize them, and the exchange became a platitudinous melee. At the time, I thought Ken's assertion was stupid, and I wrote him off. But his sentence has stayed with me all these years, and I think I am finally coming to understand it.

Ken Harvey was gasping for air. School can be a tremendously disorienting place. No matter how bad the school, you're going to encounter notions that don't fit with the assumptions and beliefs that you grew up with—maybe you'll hear these dissonant notions from teachers, maybe from the other students, and maybe you'll read them. You'll also be thrown in with all kinds of kids from all kinds of backgrounds, and that can be unsettling—this is especially true in places of rich ethnic and linguistic mix, like the L.A. basin. You'll see a handful of students far excel you in courses that sound exotic and that are only in the curriculum of the elite: French, physics, trigonometry. And all this is happening while you're trying to shape an identity, your body is changing, and your emotions are running wild. If you're a working-class kid in the vocational track, the options you'll have to deal with this will be constrained in certain ways: you're defined by your school as "slow"; you're placed in a curriculum that isn't designed to liberate you but to occupy you, or, if you're lucky, train you, though the training is for work the society does not esteem; other students are picking up the cues from your school and your curriculum and interacting with you in particular ways. If you're a kid like Ted Richard, you turn your back on all this and let your mind roam where it may. But youngsters like Ted are rare. What Ken and so many others do is protect themselves from such suffocating madness by taking on with a vengeance the identity implied in the vocational track. Reject the confusion and frustration by openly defining yourself as the Common Joe. Champion the average. Rely on your own good sense. Fuck this bullshit. Bullshit, of course, is everything you—and the others—fear is beyond you: books, essays, tests, academic scrambling, complexity, scientific reasoning, philosophical inquiry.

The tragedy is that you have to twist the knife in your own gray matter to make this defense work. You'll have to shut down, have to reject intellectual stimuli or diffuse them with sarcasm, have to cultivate stupidity, have to convert boredom from a malady into a way of confronting the world. Keep your vocabulary simple, act stoned when you're not or act more stoned than you are, flaunt ignorance, materialize your dreams. It is a powerful and effective defense—it neutralizes the insult and the frustration of being a

vocational kid and, when perfected, it drives teachers up the wall, a delightful secondary effect. But like all strong magic, it exacts a price.

My own deliverance from the Voc. Ed. world began with sophomore biology. Every student, college prep to vocational, had to take biology, and unlike the other courses, the same person taught all sections. When teaching the vocational group, Brother Clint probably slowed down a bit or omitted a little of the fundamental biochemistry, but he used the same book and more or less the same syllabus across the board. If one class got tough, he could get tougher. He was young and powerful and very handsome, and looks and physical strength were high currency. No one gave him any trouble.

I was pretty bad at the dissecting table, but the lectures and the textbook were interesting: plastic overlays that, with each turned page, peeled away skin, then veins and muscle, then organs, down to the very bones that Brother Clint, pointer in hand, would tap out on our hanging skeleton. Dave Snyder was in big trouble, for the study of life—versus the living of it—was sticking in his craw. We worked out a code for our multiple-choice exams. He'd poke me in the back: once for the answer under *A*, twice for *B*, and so on; and when he'd hit the right one, I'd look up to the ceiling as though I were lost in thought. Poke: cytoplasm. Poke, poke: methane. Poke, poke, poke: William Harvey. Poke, poke, poke, poke: islets of Langerhans. This didn't work out perfectly, but Dave passed the course, and I mastered the dreamy look of a guy on a record jacket. And something else happened. Brother Clint puzzled over this Voc. Ed. kid who was racking up 98s and 99s on his tests. He checked the school's records and discovered the error. He recommended that I begin my junior year in the College Prep program. According to all I've read since, such a shift, as one report put it, is virtually impossible. Kids at that level rarely cross tracks. The telling thing is how chancy both my placement into and exit from Voc. Ed. was; neither I nor my parents had anything to do with it. I lived in one world during spring semester, and when I came back to school in the fall, I was living in another.

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Switching to College Prep was a mixed blessing. I was an erratic student. I was undisciplined. And I hadn't caught onto the rules of the game: why work hard in a class that didn't grab my fancy? I was also hopelessly behind in math. Chemistry was hard; toying with my chemistry set years before hadn't prepared me for the chemist's equations. Fortunately, the priest who taught both chemistry and second-year algebra was also the school's athletic director. Membership on the track team covered me; I knew I wouldn't get lower than a C. U.S. history was taught pretty well, and I did okay. But civics was taken over by a football coach who had trouble reading the textbook aloud—and reading aloud was the centerpiece of his pedagogy. College Prep at Mercy was certainly an improvement over the vocational program—at least it carried some status—but the social science curriculum was weak, and the mathematics and physical sciences were simply beyond me. I had a miserable quantitative background and ended up copying some assignments and finessing the rest as best I could. Let me try to explain how it feels to see again and again material you should once have learned but didn't.

You are given a problem. It requires you to simplify algebraic fractions or to multiply expressions containing square roots. You know this is pretty basic material because you've seen it for years. Once a teacher took some time with you, and you learned how to carry out these operations. Simple versions, anyway. But that was a year or two or more

in the past, and these are more complex versions, and now you're not sure. And this, you keep telling yourself, is ninth- or even eighth-grade stuff.

Next it's a word problem. This is also old hat. The basic elements are as familiar as story characters: trains speeding so many miles per hour or shadows of buildings angling so many degrees. Maybe you know enough, have sat through enough explanations, to be able to begin setting up the problem: "If one train is going this fast . . ." or "This shadow is really one line of a triangle . . ." Then: "Let's see . . ." "How did Jones do this?" "Hmmmm." "No." "No, that won't work." Your attention wavers. You wonder about other things: a football game, a dance, that cute new checker at the market. You try to focus on the problem again. You scribble on paper for a while, but the tension wins out and your attention flits elsewhere. You crumple the paper and begin daydreaming to ease the frustration.

The particulars will vary, but in essence this is what a number of students go through, especially those in so-called remedial classes. They open their textbooks and see once again the familiar and impenetrable formulas and diagrams and terms that have stumped them for years. There is no excitement here. *No* excitement. Regardless of what the teacher says, this is not a new challenge. There is, rather, embarrassment and frustration and, not surprisingly, some anger in being reminded once again of long-standing inadequacies. No wonder so many students finally attribute their difficulties to something inborn, organic: "That part of my brain just doesn't work." Given the troubling histories many of these students have, it's miraculous that any of them can lift the shroud of hopelessness sufficiently to make deliverance from these classes possible.

Through this entire period, my father's health was deteriorating with cruel momentum. His arteriosclerosis progressed to the point where a simple nick on his shin wouldn't heal. Eventually it ulcerated and widened. Lou Minton would come by daily to change the dressing. We tried renting an oscillating bed—which we placed in the front room—to force blood through the constricted arteries in my father's legs. The bed hummed through the night, moving in place to ward off the inevitable. The ulcer continued to spread, and the doctors finally had to amputate. My grandfather had lost his leg in a stockyard accident. Now my father too was crippled. His convalescence was slow but steady, and the doctors placed him in the Santa Monica Rehabilitation Center, a sun-bleached building that opened out onto the warm spray of the Pacific. The place gave him some strength and some color and some training in walking with an artificial leg. He did pretty well for a year or so until he slipped and broke his hip. He was confined to a wheelchair after that, and the confinement contributed to the diminishing of his body and spirit.

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I am holding a picture of him. He is sitting in his wheelchair and smiling at the camera. The smile appears forced, unsteady, seems to quaver, though it is frozen in silver nitrate. He is in his mid-sixties and looks eighty. Late in my junior year, he had a stroke and never came out of the resulting coma. After that, I would see him only in dreams, and to this day that is how I join him. Sometimes the dreams are sad and grisly and primal: my father lying in a bed soaked with his suppuration, holding me, rocking me. But sometimes the dreams bring him back to me healthy: him talking to me on an empty street, or buying some pictures to decorate our old house, or transformed somehow into someone strong and adept with tools and the physical.

Jack MacFarland couldn't have come into my life at a better time. My father was dead, and I had logged up too many years of scholastic indifference. Mr. MacFarland had a master's degree from Columbia and decided, at twenty-six, to find a little school and teach his hekt out. He never took any credentialing courses, couldn't bear to, he said, so he had to find employment in a private system. He ended up at Our Lady of Mercy teaching five sections of senior English. He was a beatnik who was born too late. His teeth were stained, he tucked his sorry tie in between the third and fourth buttons of his shirt, and his pants were chronically wrinkled. At first, we couldn't believe this guy, thought he slept in his car. But within no time, he had us so startled with work that we didn't much worry about where he slept or if he slept at all. We wrote three or four essays a month. We read a book every two to three weeks, starting with the *Iliad* and ending up with Hemingway. He gave us a quiz on the reading every other day. He brought a prep school curriculum to Mercy High.

MacFarland's lectures were crafted, and as he delivered them he would pace the room jiggling a piece of chalk in his cupped hand, using it to scribble on the board the names of all the writers and philosophers and plays and novels he was weaving into his discussion. He asked questions often, raised everything from Zeno's paradox to the repeated last line of Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." He slowly and carefully built up our knowledge of Western intellectual history—with facts, with connections, with speculations. We learned about Greek philosophy, about Dante, the Elizabethan world view, the Age of Reason, existentialism. He analyzed poems with us, had us reading sections from John Ciardi's *How Does a Poem Mean?,* making a potentially difficult book accessible with his own explanations. We gave oral reports on poems Ciardi didn't cover. We imitated the styles of Conrad, Hemingway, and *Time* magazine. We wrote and talked, wrote and talked. The man immersed us in language.

Even MacFarland's barbs were literary. If Jim Fitzsimmons, hung over and irritable, tried to smart-ass him, he'd rejoin with a flourish that would spark the indomitable Skip Madison—who'd lost his front teeth in a hapless tackle—to flick his tongue through the gap and opine, "good chop," drawing out the single "o" in stinging indictment. Jack MacFarland, this tobacco-stained intellectual, brandished linguistic weapons of a kind I hadn't encountered before. Here was this *egghead,* for God's sake, keeping some pretty difficult people in line. And from what I heard, Mike Dweetz and Steve Fusco and all the notorious Voc. Ed. crowd settled down as well when MacFarland took the podium. Though a lot of guys groused in the schoolyard, it just seemed that giving trouble to this particular teacher was a silly thing to do. Tomfoolery, not to mention assault, had no place in the world he was trying to create for us, and instinctively everyone knew that. If nothing else, we all recognized MacFarland's considerable intelligence and respected the hours he put into his work. It came to this: the troublemaker would look foolish rather than daring. Even Jim Fitzsimmons was reading *On the Road* and turning his incipient alcoholism to literary ends.

There were some lives that were already beyond Jack MacFarland's ministrations, but mine was not. I started reading again as I hadn't since elementary school. I would go into our gloomy little bedroom or sit at the dinner table while, on the television, Danny McShane was paralyzing Mr. Moto with the atomic drop, and work slowly back through *Heart of Darkness,* trying to catch the words in Conrad's sentences. I certainly was not MacFarland's best student; most of the other guys in College Prep, even my fellow

slackers, had better backgrounds than I did. But I worked very hard, for MacFarland had hooked me. He tapped my old interest in reading and creating stories. He gave me a way to feel special by using my mind. And he provided a role model that wasn't shaped on physical prowess alone, and something inside me that I wasn't quite aware of responded to that. Jack MacFarland established a literacy club, to borrow a phrase of Frank Smith's, and invited me—invited all of us—to join.

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There's been a good deal of research and speculation suggesting that the acknowledgement of school performance with extrinsic rewards—smiling faces, stars, numbers, grades—diminishes the intrinsic satisfaction children experience by engaging in reading or writing or problem solving. While it's certainly true that we've creked an educational system that encourages our best and brightest to become cynical grade collectors and, in general, have developed an obsession with evaluation and assessment, I must tell you that venal though it may have been, I loved getting good grades from MacFarland. I now know how subjective grades can be, but then they came tucked in the back of essays like bits of scientific data, some sort of spectroscopic readout that said, objectively and publicly, that I had made something of value. I suppose I'd been mediocre for too long and enjoyed a public redefinition. And I suppose the workings of my mind, such as they were, had been private for too long. My linguistic play moved into the world; . . . these papers with their circled, red B-pluses and A-minuses linked my mind to something outside it. I carried them around like a club emblem.

One day in the December of my senior year, Mr. MacFarland asked me where I was going to go to college. I hadn't thought much about it. Many of the students I teach today spent their last year in high school with a physics text in one hand and the Stanford catalog in the other, but I wasn't even aware of what "entrance requirements" were. My folks would say that they wanted me to go to college and be a doctor, but I don't know how seriously I ever took that; it seemed a sweet thing to say, a bit of supportive family chatter, like telling a gangly daughter she's graceful. The reality of higher education wasn't in my scheme of things: no one in the family had gone to college; only two of my uncles had completed high school. I figured I'd get a night job and go to the local junior college because I knew that Snyder and Company were going there to play ball. But I hadn't even prepared for that. When I finally said, "I don't know," MacFarland looked down at me—I was seated in his office—and said, "Listen, you can write."

My grades stank. I had A's in biology and a handful of B's in a few English and social science classes. All the rest were C's—or worse. MacFarland said I would do well in his class and laid down the law about doing well in the others. Still, the record for my first three years wouldn't have been acceptable to any four-year school. To nobody's surprise, I was turned down flat by USC and UCLA. But Jack MacFarland was on the case. He had received his bachelor's degree from Loyola University, so he made calls to old professors and talked to somebody in admissions and wrote me a strong letter. Loyola finally accepted me as a probationary student. I would be on trial for the first year, and if I did okay, I would be granted regular status. MacFarland also intervened to get me a loan, for I could never have afforded a private college without it. Four more years of religion classes and four more years of boys at one school, girls at another. But at least I was going to college. Amazing.

In my last semester of high school, I elected a special English course fashioned by Mr. MacFarland, and it was through this elective that there arose at Mercy a fledgling literati. Art Mitz, the editor of the school newspaper and a very smart guy, was the kingpin. He was joined by me and by Mark Dever, a quiet boy who wrote beautifully and who would die before he was forty. MacFarland occasionally invited us to his apartment, and those visits became the high point of our apprenticeship: we'd clamp on our training wheels and drive to his salon.

He lived in a cramped and cluttered place near the airport, tucked away in the kind of building that architectural critic Reyner Banham calls a *dingbat*. Books were all over: stacked, piled, tossed, and crated, underlined and dog eared, well worn and new. Cigarette ashes crusted with coffee in saucers or spilled over the sides of motel ashtrays. The little bedroom had, along two of its walls, bricks and boards loaded with notes, magazines, and oversized books. The kitchen joined the living room, and there was a stack of German newspapers under the sink. I had never seen anything like it: a great flophouse of language furnished by City Lights and Café le Metro. I read every title. I flipped through paperbacks and scanned jackets and memorized names: Gogol, *Finnegans Wake,* Djuna Barnes, Jackson Pollock, *A Coney Island of the Mind,* F. O. Matthiessen's *American Renaissance,* all sorts of Freud, *Troubled Sleep,* Man Ray, *The Education of Henry Adams,* Richard Wright, *Film as Art,* William Butler Yeats, Marguerite Duras, *Redburn, A Season in Hell, Kapital*. On the cover of Alain-Fournier's *The Wanderer* was an Edward Gorey drawing of a young man on a road winding into dark trees. By the hotplate sat a strange Kafka novel called *Amerika,* in which an adolescent hero crosses the Atlantic to find the Nature Theater of Oklahoma. Art and Mark would be talking about a movie or the school newspaper, and I would be consuming my English teacher's library. It was heady stuff. I felt like a Pop Warner athlete on steroids.

Art, Mark, and I would buy stogies and triangulate from MacFarland's apartment to the Cinema, which now shows X-rated films but was then L.A.'s premier art theater, and then to the musty Cherokee Bookstore in Hollywood to hobnob with beatnik homosexuals—smoking, drinking bourbon and coffee, and trying out awkward phrases we'd gleaned from our mentor's bookshelves. I was happy and precocious and a little scared as well, for Hollywood Boulevard was thick with a kind of decadence that was foreign to the South Side. After the Cherokee, we would head back to the security of MacFarland's apartment, slaphappy with hipness.

Let me be the first to admit that there was a good deal of adolescent passion in this embrace of the avant-garde: self-absorption, sexually charged pedantry, an elevation of the odd and abandoned. Still it was a time during which I absorbed an awful lot of information: long lists of titles, images from expressionist paintings, new wave shibboleths, snippets of philosophy, and names that read like Steve Fusco's misspellings—Goethe, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard. Now this is hardly the stuff of deep understanding. But it was an introduction, a phrase book, a Baedeker to a vocabulary of ideas, and it felt good at the time to know all these words. With hindsight I realize how layered and important that knowledge was.

It enabled me to do things in the world. I could browse bohemian bookstores in far-off, mysterious Hollywood; I could go to the Cinema and see events through the lenses of

European directors; and, most of all, I could share an evening, talk that talk, with Jack MacFarland, the man I most admired at the time. Knowledge was becoming a bonding agent. Within a year or two, the persona of the disaffected hipster would prove too cynical, too alienated to last. But for a time it was new and exciting: it provided a critical perspective on society, and it allowed me to act as though I were living beyond the limiting boundaries of South Vermont.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
In what way does Rose's title, "I Just Wanna Be Average," reflect the central idea of this excerpt from his book? What is ironic about the title?

2.
Rose's experience was based on what is known in education as tracking or homogeneous grouping. Did the schools you attended use this system of grouping? How did grouping (or nongrouping) work out for you? From your own experiences, what do you see as the advantages and disadvantages of tracking?

3.
Rose gives five examples of different teachers in his high school. What are the general characteristics each teacher displays? Do you think these characteristics are representative of teachers today? Explain.

4.
After Brother Clint discovered that Rose was misplaced in his classes, Rose says he hadn't quite "caught onto the rules of the game: why work hard in a class that didn't grab my fancy?" What are the "rules of the game" in education today? What advice would you give to a student who finds a particular (required) class boring?

5.
Rose's most influential teacher, Jack MacFarland, "immersed" his class in language. What subjects (if any) have you been immersed in during your educational experience? What subjects were taught to you on a surface, cursory level? What effect did each approach have on you?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
What effect do grades really have on students? Consult the *Education Index* at your library to find several sources on this subject. Write an essay describing the findings of several authorities who have differing opinions on this subject. Which opinions do you favor, based on your own experiences? Explain.

2.
After reading several sources on the pros and cons of tracking, research the schools in your area to determine what approach they take toward tracking. Interview educators, principals, parents, and (with permission) students. Then write a report explaining your findings.

MAYA ANGELOU

Graduation in Stamps

Originally named Marguerite Johnson, Maya Angelou was born in St. Louis in 1928. From the time she was three until she was eight, Angelou and her brother grew up in Stamps, Arkansas, under the watchful, loving eye of their grandmother, whom they called "Momma." Unfortunately, her grandmother's boundless energy and affection could not protect Angelou from the pain of poverty, segregated schools, and violence at the hands of both whites and blacks. At age eight, she went to stay with her mother. At her mother's home, she was raped by her mother's lover; subsequently, Angelou refused to talk for more than a year. Shortly after the rape, she returned to her grandmother's home, where she began to read voraciously, memorizing extensive passages from writers varying from Shakespeare to the poets of the Harlem Renaissance. The cadences and rhythms of her early love affair with poetry weave throughout her works. In 1972 her book of poems, Just Give Me a Cool Drink of Water 'fore I Die, *was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. In 1993, as Poet Laureate of the United States, she wrote and read a poem for the inauguration of President Clinton.*

A champion of the narrative as complex, serious art, Angelou sees her work as "stemming from the slave narrative and developing into a new American literary form." This selection, a chapter from Angelou's highly praised autobiography, I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings *(1969), demonstrates her strong and hopeful vision of the African American experience.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

In your opinion, how seriously do most American students take their education today? Using your own experience as well as your observations, is education in this country considered a right or a privilege? Please explain.

2.

Reflect on your graduation from junior high to high school. Whether or not a formal ceremony marked this change, how did you feel as you completed this level of schooling? What reactions did your family, friends, and teachers have toward this rite of passage?

3.

Reflect back on your grade school days and list as many projects, readings, lessons, tests, and quizzes that you can remember. Based on this list, what can you conclude about your knowledge, in general?

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The children in Stamps trembled visibly with anticipation. Some adults were excited too, but to be certain the whole young population had come down with graduation epidemic. Large classes were graduating from both the grammar school and the high school. Even those who were years removed from their own day of glorious release were anxious to help with preparations as a kind of dry run. The junior students who were moving into the vacating classes' chairs were tradition-bound to show their talents for leadership and management. They strutted through the school and around the campus exerting pressure

on the lower grades. Their authority was so new that occasionally if they pressed a little too hard it had to be overlooked. After all, next term was coming, and it never hurt a sixth grader to have a play sister in the eighth grade, or a tenth-year student to be able to call a twelfth grader Bubba. So all was endured in a spirit of shared understanding. But the graduating classes themselves were the nobility. Like travelers with exotic destinations on their minds, the graduates were remarkably forgetful. They came to school without their books, or tablets or even pencils. Volunteers fell over themselves to secure replacements for the missing equipment. When accepted, the willing workers might or might not be thanked, and it was of no importance to the pre-graduation rites. Even teachers were respectful of the now quiet and aging seniors, and tended to speak to them, if not as equals, as beings only slightly lower than themselves. After tests were returned and grades given, the student body, which acted like an extended family, knew who did well, who excelled, and what piteous ones had failed.

Unlike the white high school, Lafayette County Training School distinguished itself by having neither lawn, nor hedges, nor tennis court, nor climbing ivy. Its two buildings (main classrooms, the grade school and home economics) were set on a dirt hill with no fence to limit either its boundaries or those of bordering farms. There was a large expanse to the left of the school which was used alternately as a baseball diamond or a basketball court. Rusty hoops on the swaying poles represented the permanent recreational equipment, although bats and balls could be borrowed from the P.E. teacher if the borrower was qualified and if the diamond wasn't occupied.

Over this rocky area relieved by a few shady tall persimmon trees the graduating class walked. The girls often held hands and no longer bothered to speak to the lower students. There was a sadness about them, as if this old world was not their home and they were bound for higher ground. The boys, on the other hand, had become more friendly, more outgoing. A decided change from the closed attitude they projected while studying for finals. Now they seemed not ready to give up the old school, the familiar paths and classrooms. Only a small percentage would be continuing on to college—one of the South's A & M (agricultural and mechanical) schools, which trained Negro youths to be carpenters, farmers, handymen, masons, maids, cooks and baby nurses. Their future rode heavily on their shoulders, and blinded them to the collective joy that had pervaded the lives of the boys and girls in the grammar school graduating class.

Parents who could afford it had ordered new shoes and ready-made clothes for themselves from Sears and Roebuck or Montgomery Ward. They also engaged the best seamstresses to make the floating graduating dresses and to cut down secondhand pants which would be pressed to a military slickness for the important event.

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Oh, it was important, all right. Whitefolks would attend the ceremony, and two or three would speak of God and home, and the Southern way of life, and Mrs. Parsons, the principal's wife, would play the graduation march while the lower-grade graduates paraded down the aisles and took their seats below the platform. The high school seniors would wait in empty classrooms to make their dramatic entrance.

In the Store I was the person of the moment. The birthday girl. The center. Bailey had graduated the year before, although to do so he had had to forfeit all pleasures to make up for his time lost in Baton Rouge.

My class was wearing butter-yellow piqué dresses, and Momma launched out on mine. She smocked the yoke into tiny crisscrossing puckers, then shirred the rest of the bodice. Her dark fingers ducked in and out of the lemony cloth as she embroidered raised daisies around the hem. Before she considered her-self finished she had added a crocheted cuff on the puff sleeves, and a pointy crocheted collar.

I was going to be lovely. A walking model of all the various styles of fine hand sewing and it didn't worry me that I was only twelve years old and merely graduating from the eighth grade. Besides, many teachers in Arkansas Negro schools had only that diploma and were licensed to impart wisdom.

The days had become longer and more noticeable. The faded beige of former times had been replaced with strong and sure colors. I began to see my classmates' clothes, their skin tones, and the dust that waved off pussy willows. Clouds that lazed across the sky were objects of great concern to me. Their shiftier shapes might have held a message that in my new happiness and with a little bit of time I'd soon decipher. During that period I looked at the arch of heaven so religiously my neck kept a steady ache. I had taken to smiling more often, and my jaws hurt from the unaccustomed activity. Between the two physical sore spots, I suppose I could have been uncomfortable, but that was not the case. As a member of the winning team (the graduating class of 1940) I had outdistanced unpleasant sensations by miles. I was headed for the freedom of open fields.

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Youth and social approval allied themselves with me and we trammeled memories of slights and insults. The wind of our swift passage remodeled my features. Lost tears were pounded to mud and then to dust. Years of withdrawal were brushed aside and left behind, as hanging ropes of parasitic moss. My work alone had awarded me a top place and I was going to be one of the first called in the graduating ceremonies. On the classroom blackboard, as well as on the bulletin board in the auditorium, there were blue stars and white stars and red stars. No absences, no tardinesses, and my academic work was among the best of the year. I could say the preamble to the Constitution even faster than Bailey. We timed ourselves often: "WethepeopleoftheUnited Statesinordertoformamoreperfectunion . . ." I had memorized the Presidents of the United States from Washington to Roosevelt in chronological as well as alphabetical order.

My hair pleased me too. Gradually the black mass had lengthened and thickened, so that it kept at last to its braided pattern, and I didn't have to yank my scalp off when I tried to comb it.

Louise and I had rehearsed the exercises until we tired out ourselves. Henry Reed was class valedictorian. He was a small, very black boy with hooded eyes, a long, broad nose and an oddly shaped head. I had admired him for years because each term he and I vied for the best grades in our class. Most often he bested me, but instead of being disappointed, I was pleased that we shared top places between us. Like many Southern black children, he lived with his grandmother, who was as strict as Momma and as kind as she knew how to be. He was courteous, respectful and soft-spoken to elders, but on the playground he chose to play the roughest games. I admired him. Anyone, I reckoned, sufficiently afraid or sufficiently dull could be polite. But to be able to operate at a top level with both adults and children was admirable.

His valedictory speech was entitled "To Be or Not to Be." The rigid tenth-grade teacher had helped him write it. He'd been working on the dramatic stresses for months.

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The weeks until graduation were filled with heady activities. A group of small children were to be presented in a play about buttercups and daisies and bunny rabbits. They could be heard throughout the building practicing their hops and their little songs that sounded like silver bells. The older girls (non-graduates, of course) were assigned the task of making refreshments for the night's festivities. A tangy scent of ginger, cinnamon, nutmeg and chocolate wafted around the home economics building as the budding cooks made samples for themselves and their teachers.
In every corner of the workshop, axes and saws split fresh timber as the woodshop boys made sets and stage scenery. Only the graduates were left out of the general bustle. We were free to sit in the library at the back of the building or look in quite detachedly, naturally, on the measures being taken for our event.
Even the minister preached on graduation the Sunday before. His subject was, "Let your light so shine that men will see your good works and praise your Father, Who is in Heaven." Although the sermon was purported to be addressed to us, he used the occasion to speak to backsliders, gamblers and general ne'er-do-wells. But since he had called our names at the beginning of the service we were mollified.
Among Negros the tradition was to give presents to children going only from one grade to another. How much more important this was when the person was graduating at the top of the class. Uncle Willie and Momma had sent away for a Mickey Mouse watch like Bailey's. Louise gave me four embroidered handkerchiefs. (I gave her three crocheted doilies.) Mrs. Sneed, the minister's wife, made me an underskirt to wear for graduation, and nearly every customer gave me a nickel or maybe even a dime with the instruction "Keep on moving to higher ground," or some such encouragement.
Amazingly the great day finally dawned and I was out of bed before I knew it. I threw open the back door to see it more clearly, but Momma said, "Sister, come away from that door and put your robe on."
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I hoped the memory of that morning would never leave me. Sunlight was itself still young, and the day had none of the insistence maturity would bring it in a few hours. In my robe and barefoot in the backyard, under cover of going to see about my new beans, I gave myself up to the gentle warmth and thanked God that no matter what evil I had done in my life He had allowed me to live to see this day. Somewhere in my fatalism I had expected to die, accidentally, and never have the chance to walk up the stairs in the auditorium and gracefully receive my hard-earned diploma. Out of God's merciful bosom I had won reprieve.
Bailey came out in his robe and gave me a box wrapped in Christmas paper. He said he had saved his money for months to pay for it. It felt like a box of chocolates, but I knew Bailey wouldn't save money to buy candy when we had all we could want under our noses.
He was as proud of the gift as I. It was a soft-leather-bound copy of a collection of poems by Edgar Allan Poe, or, as Bailey and I called him, "Eap." I turned to "Annabel Lee" and we walked up and down the garden rows, the cool dirt between our toes, reciting the beautifully sad lines.
Momma made a Sunday breakfast although it was only Friday. After we finished the blessing, I opened my eyes to find the watch on my plate. It was a dream of a day.

Everything went smoothly and to my credit. I didn't have to be reminded or scolded for anything. Near evening I was too jittery to attend to chores, so Bailey volunteered to do all before his bath.

Days before, we had made a sign for the Store, and as we turned out the lights Momma hung the cardboard over the doorknob. It read clearly: CLOSED: GRADUATION.

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My dress fitted perfectly and everyone said that I looked like a sunbeam in it. On the hill, going toward the school, Bailey walked behind with Uncle Willie, who muttered, "Go on, Ju." He wanted him to walk ahead with us because it embarrassed him to have to walk so slowly. Bailey said he'd let the ladies walk together, and the men would bring up the rear. We all laughed, nicely.

Little children dashed by out of the dark like fireflies. Their crepe paper dresses and butterfly wings were not made for running and we heard more than one rip, dryly, and the regretful "uh uh" that followed.

The school blazed without gaiety. The windows seemed cold and unfriendly from the lower hill. A sense of ill-fated timing crept over me, and if Momma hadn't reached for my hand I would have drifted back to Bailey and Uncle Willie, and possibly beyond. She made a few slow jokes about my feet getting cold, and tugged me along to the now-strange building.

Around the front steps, assurance came back. There were my fellow "greats," the graduating class. Hair brushed back, legs oiled, new dresses and pressed pleats, fresh pocket handkerchiefs and little handbags, all home-sewn. Oh, we were up to snuff, all right. I joined my comrades and didn't even see my family go in to find seats in the crowded auditorium.

The school band struck up a march and all classes filed in as had been rehearsed. We stood in front of our seats, as assigned, and on a signal from the choir director, we sat. No sooner had this been accomplished than the band started to play the national anthem. We rose again and sang the song, after which we recited the pledge of allegiance. We remained standing for a brief minute before the choir director and the principal signaled to us, rather desperately I thought, to take our seats. The command was so unusual that our carefully rehearsed and smooth-running machine was thrown off. For a full minute we fumbled for our chairs and bumped into each other awkwardly. Habits change or solidify under pressure, so in our state of nervous tension we had been ready to follow our usual assembly pattern: the American national anthem, then the pledge of allegiance, then the song every Black person I knew called the Negro National Anthem. All done in the same key, with the same passion and most often standing on the same foot.

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Finding my seat at last, I was overcome with a presentiment of worse things to come. Something unrehearsed, unplanned, was going to happen, and we were going to be made to look bad. I distinctly remember being explicit in the choice of pronoun. It was "we," the graduating class, the unit, that concerned me then.

The principal welcomed "parents and friends" and asked the Baptist minister to lead us in prayer. His invocation was brief and punchy, and for a second I thought we were getting back on the high road to right action. When the principal came back to the dais, however, his voice had changed. Sounds always affected me profoundly and the principal's voice was one of my favorites. During assembly it melted and lowed weakly into the audience.

It had not been in my plan to listen to him, but my curiosity was piqued and I straightened up to give him my attention.
He was talking about Booker T. Washington, our "late great leader," who said we can be as close as the fingers on the hand, etc. . . . Then he said a few vague things about friendship and the friendship of kindly people to those less fortunate than themselves. With that his voice nearly faded, thin, away. Like a river diminishing to a stream and then to a trickle. But he cleared his throat and said, "Our speaker tonight, who is also our friend, came from Texarkana to deliver the commencement address, but due to the irregularity of the train schedule, he's going to, as they say, 'speak and run."' He said that we understood and wanted the man to know that we were most grateful for the time he was able to give us and then something about how we were willing always to adjust to another's program; and without more ado—"I give you Mr. Edward Donleavy."
Not one but two white men came through the door offstage. The shorter one walked to the speaker's platform, and the tall one moved over to the center seat and sat down. But that was our principal's seat, and already occupied. The dislodged gentleman bounced around for a long breath or two before the Baptist minister gave him his chair, then with more dignity than the situation deserved, the minister walked off the stage.
Donleavy looked at the audience once (on reflection, I'm sure that he wanted only to reassure himself that we were really there), adjusted his glasses and began to read from a sheaf of papers.
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He was glad "to be here and to see the work going on just as it was in the other schools." At the first "Amen" from the audience I willed the offender to immediate death by choking on the word. But Amens and Yes, sir's began to fall around the room like rain through a ragged umbrella.
He told us of the wonderful changes we children in Stamps had in store. The Central School (naturally, the white school was Central) had already been granted improvements that would be in use in the fall. A well-known artist was coming from Little Rock to teach art to them. They were going to have the newest microscopes and chemistry equipment for their laboratory. Mr. Donleavy didn't leave us long in the dark over who made these improvements available to Central High. Nor were we to be ignored in the general betterment scheme he had in mind.
He said that he had pointed out to people at a very high level that one of the first-line football tacklers at Arkansas Agricultural and Mechanical College had graduated from good old Lafayette County Training School. Here fewer Amen's were heard. Those few that did break through lay dully in the air with the heaviness of habit.
He went on to praise us. He went on to say how he had bragged that "one of the best basketball players at Fisk sank his first ball right here at Lafayette County Training School."
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The white kids were going to have a chance to become Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys (the girls weren't even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owenses and Joe Louises.
Owens and the Brown Bomber were great heroes in our world, but what school official in the white-goddom of Little Rock had the right to decide that those two men must be our only heroes? Who decided that for Henry Reed to become a scientist he had to work like

George Washington Carver, as a bootblack, to buy a lousy microscope? Bailey was obviously always going to be too small to be an athlete, so which concrete angel glued to what county seat had decided that if my brother wanted to become a lawyer he had to first pay penance for his skin by picking cotton and hoeing corn and studying correspondence books at night for twenty years?

The man's dead words fell like bricks around the auditorium and too many settled in my belly. Constrained by hard-learned manners I couldn't look behind me, but to my left and right the proud graduating class of 1940 had dropped their heads. Every girl in my row had found something new to do with her handkerchief. Some folded the tiny squares into love knots, some into triangles, but most were wadding them, then pressing them flat on their yellow laps.

On the dais, the ancient tragedy was being replayed. Professor Parsons sat, a sculptor's reject, rigid. His large, heavy body seemed devoid of will or willingness, and his eyes said he was no longer with us. The other teachers examined the flag (which was draped stage right) or their notes, or the windows which opened on our now-famous playing diamond.

Graduation, the hush-hush magic time of frills and gifts and congratulations and diplomas, was finished for me before my name was called. The accomplishment was nothing. The meticulous maps, drawn in three colors of ink, learning and spelling decasyllabic words, memorizing the whole of *The Rape of Lucrece*—it was for nothing. Donleavy had exposed us.

We were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous.

Then I wished that Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner had killed all whitefolks in their beds and that Abraham Lincoln had been assassinated before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and that Harriet Tubman had been killed by that blow on her head and Christopher Columbus had drowned in the *Santa Maria.*

It was awful to be Negro and have no control over my life. It was brutal to be young and already trained to sit quietly and listen to charges brought against my color with no chance of defense. We should all be dead. I thought I should like to see us all dead, one on top of the other. A pyramid of flesh with the whitefolks on the bottom, as the broad base, then the Indians with their silly tomahawks and tepees and wigwams and treaties, the Negroes with their mops and recipes and cotton sacks and spirituals sticking out of their mouths. The Dutch children should all stumble in their wooden shoes and break their necks. The French should choke to death on the Louisiana Purchase (1803) while silkworms ate all the Chinese with their stupid pigtails. As a species, we were an abomination. All of us.

Donleavy was running for election, and assured our parents that if he won we could count on having the only colored paved playing field in that part of Arkansas. Also—he never looked up to acknowledge the grunts of acceptance—also, we were bound to get some new equipment for the home economics building and the workshop.

He finished, and since there was no need to give any more than the most perfunctory thank-you's, he nodded to the men on the stage, and the tall white man who was never introduced joined him at the door. They left with the attitude that now they were off to

something really important. (The graduation ceremonies at Lafayette County Training School had been a mere preliminary.)
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The ugliness they left was palpable. An uninvited guest who wouldn't leave. The choir was summoned and sang a modern arrangement of "Onward, Christian Soldiers," with new words pertaining to graduates seeking their place in the world. But it didn't work. Elouise, the daughter of the Baptist minister, recited "Invictus," and I could have cried at the impertinence of "I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul."
My name had lost its ring of familiarity and I had to be nudged to go and receive my diploma. All my preparations had fled. I neither marched up to the stage like a conquering Amazon, nor did I look in the audience for Bailey's nod of approval. Marguerite Johnson, I heard the name again, my honors were read, there were noises in the audience of appreciation, and I took my place on the stage as rehearsed.
I thought about colors I hated: ecru, puce, lavender, beige and black.
There was shuffling and rustling around me, then Henry Reed was giving his valedictory address, "To Be or Not to Be." Hadn't he heard the whitefolks? We couldn't *be*, so the question was a waste of time. Henry's voice came clear and strong. I feared to look at him. Hadn't he got the message? There was no "nobler in the mind" for Negroes because the world didn't think we had minds, and they let us know it. "Outrageous fortune"? Now, that was a joke. When the ceremony was over I had to tell Henry Reed some things. That is, if I still cared. Not "rub," Henry, "erase." "Ah, there's the erase." Us. Henry had been a good student in elocution. His voice rose on tides of promise and fell on waves of warnings. The English teacher had helped him to create a sermon winging through Hamlet's soliloquy. To be a man, a doer, a builder, a leader, or to be a tool, an unfunny joke, a crusher of funky toadstools. I marveled that Henry could go through the speech as if we had a choice.
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I had been listening and silently rebutting each sentence with my eyes closed; then there was a hush, which in an audience warns that something unplanned is happening. I looked up and saw Henry Reed, the conservative, the proper, the A student, turn his back to the audience and turn to us (the proud graduating class of 1940) and sing, nearly speaking,
Lift ev'ry voice and sing
Till earth and heaven ring
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty . . .*

It was the poem written by James Weldon Johnson. It was the music composed by J. Rosamond Johnson. It was the Negro national anthem. Out of habit we were singing it. Our mothers and fathers stood in the dark hall and joined the hymn of encouragement. A kindergarten teacher led the small children onto the stage and the buttercups and daisies and bunny rabbits marked time and tried to follow:
Stony the road we trod
Bitter the chastening rod
Felt in the days when hope, unborn, had died.
Yet with a steady beat
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

Every child I knew had learned that song with his ABC's and along with "Jesus Loves Me This I Know." But I personally had never heard it before. Never heard the words, despite the thousands of times I had sung them. Never thought they had anything to do with me.
On the other hand, the words of Patrick Henry had made such an impression on me that I had been able to stretch myself tall and trembling and say, "I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death."
And now I heard, really for the first time:
We have come over a way that with tears has been watered,
We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered.

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While echoes of the song shivered in the air, Henry Reed bowed his head, said "Thank you," and returned to his place in the line. The tears that slipped down many faces were not wiped away in shame.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
After reading this piece for the first time, write your general reaction to it. Also write down, without referring back to the narrative, the images or pictures that come to mind when you think about "Graduation in Stamps."

2.
How would you characterize this school community? How does it compare to your own grade school memories? (Refer back to the journal responses you wrote.)

3.
Although this is a short story, "Graduation in Stamps" could easily be produced as a three-act play. In small groups, brainstorm with your peers in order to distinguish what these three acts might be, give each act an appropriate title, and come to a consensus as to what emotions dominate each separate act.

4.
What kind of a student was Marguerite, and what details from the story lead you to this conclusion?

5.
In paragraphs 46 and 47, Marguerite wishes that "Nat Turner had killed all whitefolks in their beds" and that all Negroes "should be dead." What causes her thoughts to become so angry and morbid, and why does she call all such ethnic groups an "abomination"? What is your reaction to this section?

6.
Discuss Henry Reed's decision at the end of the ceremony, and react to the story's last line.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Write an analysis of Angelou's 1993 inauguration poem.

2.
Write an essay in which you compare the Negro National Anthem with the national anthem of the United States. In addition to analyzing the words, obtain the musical scores to each so that you can compare rhythms and harmonies as well.

3.
Working in small groups, write up one of the "acts" within this short story. Include staging, music, and lighting, and perform this act for your classmates.
MAXINE HONG KINGSTON

The Misery of Silence
Best known for her collection of essays, The Woman Warrior *(1976) and* China Men *(1980), Maxine Hong Kingston is also the author of a significant article related to multicultural studies: "Cultural Misreading by American Reviewers," in* Asian and Western Writer in Dialogue: New Cultural Identities *(1982). Born in Stockton, California, in 1940, she grew up listening to the stories of the friends and relatives who gathered in the laundry her parents operated. Following her graduation from the University of California, Berkeley, Kingston began to think deeply about how those stories had influenced her life, and she started writing down her reminiscences.*
Suggestions for Prereading and Journal Writing
1.
Freewrite about what kinds of generalizations people outside of America might make about Americans.

2.
Write about a time when you felt like a complete outsider. What made you feel as if you didn't belong in the group, and how did the insiders (the members of the group) treat you?

3.
We all have public and private faces. Write about how strangers in a classroom might perceive you, and compare their possible impressions to how you really are when you're in a comfortable environment, such as your home.
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When I went to kindergarten and had to speak English for the first time, I became silent. A dumbness—a shame—still cracks my voice in two, even when I want to say "hello" casually, or ask an easy question in front of the check-out counter, or ask directions of a bus driver. I stand frozen, or I hold up the line with the complete, grammatical sentence that comes squeaking out at impossible length. "What did you say?" says the cab driver, or "Speak up," so I have to perform again, only weaker the second time. A telephone call makes my throat bleed and takes up that day's courage. It spoils my day with self-disgust when I hear my broken voice come skittering out into the open. It makes people wince to

hear it. I'm getting better, though. Recently I asked the postman for special-issue stamps; I've waited since childhood for postmen to give me some of their own accord. I am making progress, a little every day. My silence was thickest—total—during the three years that I covered my school paintings with black paint. I painted layers of black over houses and flowers and suns, and when I drew on the blackboard, I put a layer of chalk on top. I was making a stage curtain, and it was the moment before the curtain parted or rose. The teachers called my parents to school, and I saw they had been saving my pictures, curling and cracking, all alike and black. The teachers pointed to the pictures and looked serious, talked seriously too, but my parents did not understand English. ("The parents and teachers of criminals were executed," said my father.) My parents took the pictures home. I spread them out (so black and full of possibilities) and pretended the curtains were swinging open, flying up, one after another, sunlight underneath, mighty operas.

During the first silent year I spoke to no one at school, did not ask before going to the lavatory, and flunked kindergarten. My sister also said nothing for three years, silent in the playground and silent at lunch. There were other quiet Chinese girls not of our family, but most of them got over it sooner than we did. I enjoyed the silence. At first it did not occur to me I was supposed to talk or to pass kindergarten. I talked at home and to one or two of the Chinese kids in class. I made motions and even made some jokes. I drank out of a toy saucer when the water spilled out of the cup, and everybody laughed, pointing at me, so I did it some more. I didn't know that Americans don't drink out of saucers.

I liked the Negro students (Black Ghosts) best because they laughed the loudest and talked to me as if I were a daring talker too. One of the Negro girls had her mother coil braids over her ears Shanghai-style like mine; we were Shanghai twins except that she was covered with black like my paintings. Two Negro kids enrolled in Chinese school, and the teachers gave them Chinese names. Some Negro kids walked me to school and home, protecting me from the Japanese kids, who hit me and chased me and stuck gum in my ears. The Japanese kids were noisy and tough. They appeared one day in kindergarten, released from concentration camp, which was a tic-tac-toe mark, like barbed wire, on the map.

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It was when I found out I had to talk that school became a misery, that the silence became a misery. I did not speak and felt bad each time that I did not speak. I read aloud in first grade, though, and heard the barest whisper with little squeaks come out of my throat. "Louder," said the teacher, who scared the voice away again. The other Chinese girls did not talk either, so I knew the silence had to do with being a Chinese girl.

Reading out loud was easier than speaking because we did not have to make up what to say, but I stopped often, and the teacher would think I'd gone quiet again. I could not understand "I." The Chinese "I" has seven strokes, intricacies. How could the American "I," assuredly wearing a hat like the Chinese, have only three strokes, the middle so straight? Was it out of politeness that this writer left off the strokes the way a Chinese has to write her own name small and crooked? No, it was not politeness: "I" is a capital and "you" is lower-case. I stared at that middle line and waited so long for its black center to resolve into tight strokes and dots that I forgot to pronounce it. The other troublesome word was "here," no strong consonant to hang on to, and so flat, when "here" is two mountainous ideographs. The teacher, who had already told me every day how to read "I"

and “here,” put me in the low corner under the stairs again, where the noisy boys usually sat.

When my second grade class did a play, the whole class went to the auditorium except the Chinese girls. The teacher, lovely and Hawaiian, should have understood about us, but instead left us behind in the classroom. Our voices were too soft or nonexistent, and our parents never signed the permission slips anyway. They never signed anything unnecessary. We opened the door a crack and peeked out, but closed it again quickly. One of us (not me) won every spelling bee, though.

I remember telling the Hawaiian teacher, “We Chinese can’t sing ‘land where our fathers died.”’ She argued with me about politics, while I meant because of curses. But how can I have that memory when I couldn’t talk? My mother says that we, like the ghosts, have no memories.

After American school, we picked up our cigar boxes, in which we had arranged books, brushes, and an inkbox neatly, and went to Chinese school, from 5:00 to 7:30 P.M. There we chanted together, voices rising and falling, loud and soft, some boys shouting, everybody reading together, reciting together and not alone with one voice. When we had a memorization test, the teacher let each of us come to his desk and say the lesson to him privately, while the rest of the class practiced copying or tracing. Most of the teachers were men. The boys who were so well behaved in the American school played tricks on them and talked back to them. The girls were not mute. They screamed and yelled during recess, when there were no rules; they had fistfights. Nobody was afraid of children hurting themselves or of children hurting school property. The glass doors to the red and green balconies with the gold joy symbols were left wide open so that we could run out and climb the fire escapes. We played capture-the-flag in the auditorium, where Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek’s pictures hung at the back of the stage, the Chinese flag on their left and the American flag on their right. We climbed the teak ceremonial chairs and made flying leaps off the stage. One flag headquarters was behind the glass door and the other on stage right. Our feet drummed on the hollow stage. During recess the teachers locked themselves up in their office with the shelves of books, copybooks, inks from China. They drank tea and warmed their hands at a stove. There was no play supervision. At recess we had the school to ourselves, and also we could roam as far as we could go—downtown, Chinatown stores, home—as long as we returned before the bell rang.

10

At exactly 7:30 the teacher again picked up the brass bell that sat on his desk and swung it over our heads, while we charged down the stairs, our cheering magnified in the stairwell. Nobody had to line up.

Not all of the children who were silent at American school found voice at Chinese school. One new teacher said each of us had to get up and recite in front of the class, who was to listen. My sister and I had memorized the lesson perfectly. We said it to each other at home, one chanting, one listening. The teacher called on my sister to recite first. It was the first time a teacher had called on the second-born to go first. My sister was scared. She glanced at me and looked away; I looked down at my desk. I hoped that she could do it because if she could, then I would have to. She opened her mouth and a voice came out that wasn’t a whisper, but it wasn’t a proper voice either. I hoped that she would not cry, fear breaking up her voice like twigs underfoot. She sounded as if she were trying to sing through weeping and strangling. She did not pause or stop to end the embarrassment. She

kept going until she said the last word, and then she sat down. When it was my turn, the same voice came out, a crippled animal running on broken legs. You could hear splinters in my voice, bones rubbing jagged against one another. I was loud, though. I was glad I didn't whisper.

How strange that the emigrant villagers are shouters, hollering face to face. My father asks, "Why is it I can hear Chinese from blocks away? Is it that I understand the language? Or is it they talk loud?" They turn the radio up full blast to hear the operas, which do not seem to hurt their ears. And they yell over the singers that wail over the drums, everybody talking at once, big arm gestures, spit flying. You can see the disgust on American faces looking at women like that. It isn't just the loudness. It is the way Chinese sounds, ching-chong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayonara words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian. We make guttural peasant noise and have Ton Duc Thang names you can't remember. And the Chinese can't hear Americans at all; the language is too soft and western music unhearable. I've watched a Chinese audience laugh, visit, talk-story, and holler during a piano recital, as if the musician could not hear them. A Chinese-American, somebody's son, was playing Chopin, which has no punctuation, no cymbals, no gongs. Chinese piano music is five black keys. Normal Chinese women's voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine. Apparently we whispered even more softly than the Americans. Once a year the teachers referred my sister and me to speech therapy, but our voices would straighten out, unpredictably normal, for the therapists. Some of us gave up, shook our heads, and said nothing, not one word. Some of us could not even shake our heads. At times shaking my head no is more self-assertion than I can manage. Most of us eventually found some voice, however faltering. We invented an American-feminine speaking personality.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Compare or contrast your own early educational experiences with Kingston's. What were your greatest fears, especially upon entering kindergarten or first grade? How did others perceive you? Were those perceptions accurate?

2.

Besides the obvious language barrier, what other cultural differences interfered with Kingston's education in the American school system? How could any of these differences have been alleviated?

3.

Compare or contrast the teachers' attitudes, approaches, and values in the Chinese school with those of the teachers in the American school. What conclusions or generalizations can you draw about ways of learning?

4.

Why does Kingston include the information about music at the end? Why, do you think, did she purposely choose to end the piece this way? Could this same ending have worked as an effective introduction as well? Explain.

5.
Compare Kingston's writing style with that of Maya Angelou in "Graduation in Stamps." Which one do you prefer—and why?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Interview a student or person you know from another culture in order to find out about the struggles he or she faced in a new country, with a new language. Put the interview in written form.

2.
Interview a student or person from a culture other than your own in order to compare or contrast one specific part of your cultures: holiday celebrations, funeral practices, school expectations, family rituals, social manners, and so on. Write an essay based on this comparison.

3.
Research the different ways of teaching ESL students, and write an essay, with classroom teachers as your audience, listing specific suggestions for how they can better serve the ESL student in their classrooms.

PAT MORA

Elena

Born in 1942 in El Paso, Texas, Pat Mora writes poetry, essays, and children's books that often reflect Hispanic perspectives. Mora is the director of the university museum at the University of Texas, where she also teaches. She has published Nepantla: Essays from the Land in the Middle *(1993) as well as three collections of poetry:* Chants *(1984),* Borders *(1986), and* Communion *(1991).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
If you had to go to another country and learn its language, what would be the best way for you to go about it?

2.
Write about a time you felt left out or confused because, for one reason or another, you weren't part of a group discussion.

———

My Spanish isn't enough.
I remember how I'd smile
listening to my little ones,
understanding every word they'd say,
5
their jokes, their songs, their plots.
Vamos a pedirle dulces a mamá. Vamos.
But that was in Mexico.
Now my children go to American high schools.

They speak English. At night they sit around
10
the kitchen table, laugh with one another.
I stand by the stove and feel dumb, alone.
I bought a book to learn English.
My husband frowned, drank more beer.
My oldest said, "*Mamá,* he doesn't want you
15
to be smarter than he is." I'm forty,
embarrassed at mispronouncing words,
embarrassed at the laughter of my children,
the grocer, the mailman. Sometimes I take
my English book and lock myself in the bathroom,
20
say the thick words softly,
for if I stop trying, I will be deaf
when my children need my help.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What's your initial reaction after reading this poem through?

2.
Even if you don't know Spanish, what can you gather from line 6?

3.
Go back and write down the words that you find the most powerful. Look at your list and come to some conclusion as to why these words are so effective.

4.
Discuss the different ways the parents react, as well as the insights presented by the oldest child. Besides the possible truth in what the child says, what other reasons might the father have for his behavior?

5.
In what way might the speaker's language in this poem connect to the central point she is trying to make?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Research

1.
Read another poem by Pat Mora and compare or contrast it with "Elena."

2.
Write a parody or model of this poem: Begin by filling in the blank in this line—"My———isn't enough," and continue on, using your own words, by staying as true as you can to the original rhythm and lines in this poem. After writing your parody, reflect on the process you went through. What have you discovered about writing poetry? What more have you discovered about the original poem?

_____

Edgar Allan Poe: (1809–1849) American editor, critic, poet, and short-story writer. A brilliant, haunted man, Poe created poems and stories that combined the beautiful with the grotesque, the real with the fantastic.

Booker T. Washington: (1856–1915) African American educator who founded Tuskegee Institute, a post–high school institution of learning for black students who were not, at that time, admitted to most colleges and universities. He was criticized by many African American leaders because he argued that social equality could not be attained—and should not be a goal for African Americans—until they had, on their own, attained economic independence.

Galileo: (1564–1642) Italian astronomer and physicist. He discovered many physical laws, constructed the first telescope, and confirmed the theory that the earth moves around the sun. *Madame Curie:* (1867–1934) Polish-born French physicist. She won the Nobel Prize in 1911 for the discovery of metallic radium. *Thomas Alva Edison:* (1847–1931) One of the most productive American inventors. Among his significant inventions were the record player, the motion picture, the incandescent lamp, and a system for the distribution of electricity. *Paul Gauguin:* (1848–1903) French painter, associated with the impressionists, noted especially for rejecting traditional naturalism

and, instead, using nature as an inspiration for abstract symbols and figures. *Jesse Owens:* (1913–1981) African American track star who won four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics, which were held in Berlin. Owens made a mockery of Hitler's contention that "Aryan" athletes were superior to all others. *Joe Louis:* African American boxer. Holder of the heavyweight title, Louis was known as the Brown Bomber. *George Washington Carver:* (1864–1943) African American agricultural chemist. Born a slave, he later taught at Tuskegee Institute, where he carried out research that led to crop diversification in the South. He is particularly credited with discovering new uses for crops such as peanuts and soybeans.
The Rape of Lucrece: A narrative poem, 1855 lines long, written by William Shakespeare.
Gabriel Prosser, Nat Turner: Leaders of slave rebellions. In 1800, Prosser recruited several hundred slaves to attack Richmond. Before they could attack, they were betrayed, and the leaders of the rebellion were captured and executed. In 1831, Turner led a group of slaves who eventually killed 57 white men, women, and children as a protest against slavery.

Harriet Tubman (1820–1913): An African American abolitionist who escaped from slavery in 1849 and worked with the underground railroad, leading more than 300 slaves north to freedom.

Patrick Henry: (1726–1799) A leader of the American Revolution who was admired for his skills as a public speaker. The rallying cry "Give me liberty or give me death" is attributed to him.

NICHOLAS GAGE

The Teacher Who Changed My Life

Born in Greece in 1939, Nicholas Gage has written movingly of the torture and murder in 1948 of his mother, Eleni Gatzoyiannis. In his best-selling book Eleni, *he describes the events leading to her death at the hands of Communist guerrillas when she sent her children to live in the United States. In his book* A Place for Us, *from which this essay is taken, Gage describes the difficult adjustment he and his sisters faced after arriving in their new country and pays tribute to the teacher he sees as the inspiration and motivating force behind his later success as a writer.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Write about someone you see as your mentor, your inspiration.

2.
Describe your past experiences with writing, especially in a school environment. How did you learn to write? How do you feel about writing? How would you assess your writing ability at this point in your life?

3.
What three characteristics are most important for a good teacher to possess? Explain your answer by describing your own specific experiences with good teachers.

———

The person who set the course of my life in the new land I entered as a young war refugee—who, in fact, nearly dragged me onto the path that would bring all the blessings I've received in America—was a salty-tongued, no-nonsense schoolteacher named Marjorie Hurd. When I entered her classroom in 1953, I had been to six schools in five years, starting in the Greek village where I was born in 1939.

When I stepped off a ship in New York Harbor on a gray March day in 1949, I was an undersized 9-year-old in short pants who had lost his mother and was coming to live with the father he didn't know. My mother, Eleni Gatzoyiannis, had been imprisoned, tortured and shot by Communist guerrillas for sending me and three of my four sisters to freedom. She died so that her children could go to their father in the United States.

The portly, bald, well-dressed man who met me and my sisters seemed a foreign, authoritarian figure. I secretly resented him for not getting the whole family out of Greece early enough to save my mother. Ultimately, I would grow to love him and appreciate how he dealt with becoming a single parent at the age of 56, but at first our relationship was prickly, full of hostility.

As Father drove us to our new home—a tenement in Worcester, Mass.—and pointed out the huge brick building that would be our first school in America, I clutched my Greek notebooks from the refugee camp, hoping that my few years of schooling would impress my teachers in this cold, crowded country. They didn't. When my father led me and my 11-year-old sister to Greendale Elementary School, the grim-faced Yankee principal put

the two of us in a class for the mentally retarded. There was no facility in those days for non-English-speaking children.

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By the time I met Marjorie Hurd four years later, I had learned English, been placed in a normal, graded class and had even been chosen for the college preparatory track in the Worcester public school system. I was 13 years old when our father moved us yet again, and I entered Chandler Junior High shortly after the beginning of seventh grade. I found myself surrounded by richer, smarter and better-dressed classmates who looked askance at my strange clothes and heavy accent. Shortly after I arrived, we were told to select a hobby to pursue during "club hour" on Fridays. The idea of hobbies and clubs made no sense to my immigrant ears, but I decided to follow the prettiest girl in my class—the blue-eyed daughter of the local Lutheran minister. She led me through the door marked "Newspaper Club" and into the presence of Miss Hurd, the newspaper adviser and English teacher who would become my mentor and my muse.

A formidable, solidly built woman with salt-and-pepper hair, a steely eye and a flat Boston accent, Miss Hurd had no patience with layabouts. "What are all you goof-offs doing here?" she bellowed at the would-be journalists. "This is the Newspaper Club! We're going to put out a *newspaper*. So if there's anybody in this room who doesn't like work, I suggest you go across to the Glee Club now, because you're going to work your tails off here!"

I was soon under Miss Hurd's spell. She did indeed teach us to put out a newspaper, skills I honed during my next 25 years as a journalist. Soon I asked the principal to transfer me to her English class as well. There, she drilled us on grammar until I finally began to understand the logic and structure of the English language. She assigned stories for us to read and discuss; not tales of heroes, like the Greek myths I knew, but stories of underdogs—poor people, even immigrants, who seemed ordinary until a crisis drove them to do something extraordinary. She also introduced us to the literary wealth of Greece—giving me a new perspective on my war-ravaged, impoverished homeland. I began to be proud of my origins.

One day, after discussing how writers should write about what they know, she assigned us to compose an essay from our own experience. Fixing me with a stern look, she added, "Nick, I want you to write about what happened to your family in Greece." I had been trying to put those painful memories behind me and left the assignment until the last moment. Then, on a warm spring afternoon, I sat in my room with a yellow pad and pencil and stared out the window at the buds on the trees. I wrote that the coming of spring always reminded me of the last time I said goodbye to my mother on a green and gold day in 1948.

I kept writing, one line after another, telling how the Communist guerrillas occupied our village, took our home and food, how my mother started planning our escape when she learned that the children were to be sent to reeducation camps behind the Iron Curtain and how, at the last moment, she couldn't escape with us because the guerrillas sent her with a group of women to thresh wheat in a distant village. She promised she would try to get away on her own, she told me to be brave and hung a silver cross around my neck, and then she kissed me. I watched the line of women being led down into the ravine and up the other side, until they disappeared around the bend—my mother a tiny brown figure at the end who stopped for an instant to raise her hand in one last farewell.

10
I wrote about our nighttime escape down the mountain, across the minefields and into the lines of the Nationalist soldiers, who sent us to a refugee camp. It was there that we learned of our mother's execution. I felt very lucky to have come to America, I concluded, but every year, the coming of spring made me feel sad because it reminded me of the last time I saw my mother.

I handed in the essay, hoping never to see it again, but Miss Hurd had it published in the school paper. This mortified me at first, until I saw that my classmates reacted with sympathy and tact to my family's story. Without telling me, Miss Hurd also submitted the essay to a contest sponsored by the Freedoms Foundation at Valley Forge, Pa., and it won a medal. The Worcester paper wrote about the award and quoted my essay at length. My father, by then a "five-and-dime-store chef," as the paper described him, was ecstatic with pride, and the Worcester Greek community celebrated the honor to one of its own.

For the first time I began to understand the power of the written word. A secret ambition took root in me. One day, I vowed, I would go back to Greece, find out the details of my mother's death and write about her life, so her grandchildren would know of her courage. Perhaps I would even track down the men who killed her and write of their crimes. Fulfilling that ambition would take me 30 years.

Meanwhile, I followed the literary path that Miss Hurd had so forcefully set me on. After junior high, I became the editor of my school paper at Classical High School and got a part-time job at the Worcester *Telegram and Gazette*. Although my father could only give me $50 and encouragement toward a college education, I managed to finance four years at Boston University with scholarships and part-time jobs in journalism. During my last year of college, an article I wrote about a friend who had died in the Philippines—the first person to lose his life working for the Peace Corps—led to my winning the Hearst Award for College Journalism. And the plaque was given to me in the White House by President John F. Kennedy.

For a refugee who had never seen a motorized vehicle or indoor plumbing until he was 9, this was an unimaginable honor. When the Worcester paper ran a picture of me standing next to President Kennedy, my father rushed out to buy a new suit in order to be properly dressed to receive the congratulations of the Worcester Greeks. He clipped out the photograph, had it laminated in plastic and carried it in his breast pocket for the rest of his life to show everyone he met. I found the much-worn photo in his pocket on the day he died 20 years later.

15
In our isolated Greek village, my mother had bribed a cousin to teach her to read, for girls were not supposed to attend school beyond a certain age. She had always dreamed of her children receiving an education. She couldn't be there when I graduated from Boston University, but the person who came with my father and shared our joy was my former teacher, Marjorie Hurd. We celebrated not only my bachelor's degree but also the scholarships that paid my way to Columbia's Graduate School of Journalism. There, I met the woman who would eventually become my wife. At our wedding and at the baptisms of our three children, Marjorie Hurd was always there, dancing alongside the Greeks.

By then, she was Mrs. Rabidou, for she had married a widower when she was in her early 40s. That didn't distract her from her vocation of introducing young minds to English

literature, however. She taught for a total of 41 years and continually would make a "project" of some balky student in whom she spied a spark of potential. Often these were students from the most troubled homes, yet she would alternately bully and charm each one with her own special brand of tough love until the spark caught fire. She retired in 1981 at the age of 62 but still avidly follows the lives and careers of former students while overseeing her adult stepchildren and driving her husband on camping trips to New Hampshire.

Miss Hurd was one of the first to call me on Dec. 10, 1987, when President Reagan, in his television address after the summit meeting with Gorbachev, told the nation that Eleni Gatzoyiannis' dying cry, "My children!" had helped inspire him to seek an arms agreement "for all the children of the world."

"I can't imagine a better monument for your mother," Miss Hurd said with an uncharacteristic catch in her voice.

Although a bad hip makes it impossible for her to join in the Greek dancing, Marjorie Hurd Rabidou is still an honored and enthusiastic guest at all family celebrations, including my 50th birthday picnic last summer, where the shish kebab was cooked on spits, clarinets and *bouzoukis* wailed, and costumed dancers led the guests in a serpentine line around our Colonial farmhouse, only 20 minutes from my first home in Worcester.

20

My sisters and I felt an aching void because my father was not there to lead the line, balancing a glass of wine on his head while he danced, the way he did at every celebration during his 92 years. But Miss Hurd was there, surveying the scene with quiet satisfaction. Although my parents are gone, her presence was a consolation, because I owe her so much.

This is truly the land of opportunity, and I would have enjoyed its bounty even if I hadn't walked into Miss Hurd's classroom in 1953. But she was the one who directed my grief and pain into writing, and if it weren't for her I wouldn't have become an investigative reporter and foreign correspondent, recorded the story of my mother's life and death in *Eleni* and now my father's story in *A Place for Us,* which is also a testament to the country that took us in. She was the catalyst that sent me into journalism and indirectly caused all the good things that came after. But Miss Hurd would probably deny this emphatically.

A few years ago, I answered the telephone and heard my former teacher's voice telling me, in that won't-take-no-for-an-answer tone of hers, that she had decided I was to write and deliver the eulogy at her funeral. I agreed (she didn't leave me any choice), but that's one assignment I never want to do. I hope, Miss Hurd, that you'll accept this remembrance instead.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Right from the start, Gage attributes his success in America to his seventh-grade English teacher. After reading this piece, what other factors do you see that may have contributed to Gage's success in writing?

2.

Miss Hurd opens up a new world for Gage, and at the same time she makes him proud of his origins. Think back to your own school days. Did you ever have a teacher who made

you feel proud? Describe this teacher as well as you can, and describe the incidents that encouraged your pride.
3.
What do you think about Miss Hurd's advice—to compose an essay based on one's own experience? Do you think this type of assignment might be particularly effective for seventh graders, or do you think it would be very difficult for most of them? Explain.
4.
Gage writes poignantly about how the spring makes him remember the last time he saw his mother. Do you, too, associate a particular season with a powerful memory (either sad or joyful)? If so, write about the season. Describe specifically what you see, hear, and smell that triggers thoughts of the past.
5.
Miss Hurd succeeded in finding the potential in her students. Have you ever had a teacher who sparked your potential? If so, describe this teacher and explain what talent or ability he or she helped you to develop. Explain the process as well as the effects of discovering this ability.
6.
Gage describes Miss Hurd as a catalyst in his life. What does he mean by this metaphor? List other metaphors to describe the good teachers in your own life. Then explain why you chose these metaphors.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
When Gage's piece was published, he realized how powerful language can be. Consider trying to publish something yourself. Start off writing about something that deeply concerns you—perhaps an issue in your school or community. Rewrite this piece as a letter to the editor and send it out to your local or school newspaper.
2.
Gage recounts how he and his sister were initially put into a room with mentally retarded students because the school had no English-as-a-second-language program. Research how non-English-speaking children are acclimated into the schools today. What programs are offered? How successful do you believe these programs are?
3.
Write a letter thanking a "teacher" (either in or out of the school system) who has done something special for you. Explain the difference that he or she has made in your life. Consider tracking down this person's address so that you can send the letter and thus make it more than an assignment for a class.

JACQUES D'AMBOISE

I Show a Child What Is Possible

Born in 1935, Jacques d'Amboise grew up in the inner city of New York. On the streets, he was surrounded every day by the threat of drugs, zip guns, and gangs. At home, on the other hand, his French Canadian mother read to him about the elegant court life of Versailles, telling tales of nobility and chivalry. Following her dream of beauty and culture, d'Amboise's mother arranged for her daughter to take classical ballet lessons and insisted that her son accompany his sister, hoping that at least for those few hours he would be safe from the dangers and temptations of every neighborhood street corner.

After being encouraged by his sister's teacher to join the ballet class, d'Amboise discovered his talent and love for dancing. At the age of fifteen, he joined George Balanchine's New York City Ballet and went on to become one of the finest classical dancers of our time.

Because of his own childhood experiences, d'Amboise developed a strong commitment to bringing dance to other young people whose circumstances were similar to his own. In 1976 he founded the National Dance Institute (NDI), which today has programs in more than thirty public schools in the New York City area. Most NDI dancers come from neighborhoods similar to the one d'Amboise grew up in. Most (80 percent) are black, Hispanic, or Asian. Some are homeless or have handicaps such as visual impairment or hearing loss. To each child, d'Amboise brings his joy of dance and his belief that energy and commitment to dance can bring meaning to all our lives.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Freewrite for ten to fifteen minutes about the best or worst teacher you have ever had.

2.
Write about a possible talent you have that has yet to blossom. Discuss what would have to happen in your life before this talent could come to fruition.

3.
Why is it, do you think, that most people do not pursue their childhood dreams?

———

When I was 7 years old, I was forced to watch my sister's ballet classes. This was to keep me off the street and away from my pals, who ran with gangs like the ones in *West Side Story.* The class was taught by Madame Seda, a Georgian-Armenian who had a school at 181st Street and St. Nicholas Avenue in New York City. As she taught the little girls, I would sit, fidget and diabolically try to disrupt the class by making irritating little noises. But she was very wise, Madame Seda. She let me get away with it, ignoring me until the end of the class, when everybody did the big jumps, a series of leaps in place, called *changements.*

At that point, Madame Seda turned and, stabbing a finger at me, said, "All right, little brother, if you've got so much energy, get up and do these jumps. See if you can jump as high as the girls." So I jumped. And loved it. I felt like I was flying. And she said, "Oh, that was wonderful! From now on, if you are quiet during the class, I'll let you join in the *changements.*"

After that, I'd sit quietly in the class and wait for the jumps. A few classes later, she said, "You've got to learn how to jump and not make any noise when you come down. You should learn to do the *pliés* [graceful knee bends] that come at the beginning of the class." So I would do *pliés,* then wait respectfully for the end of class to do the jumps.

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Finally she said, "You jump high, and you are landing beautifully, but you look awful in the air, flaying your arms about. You've got to take the rest of the class and learn how to do beautiful hands and arms."

I was hooked.

An exceptional teacher got a bored little kid, me, interested in ballet. How? She challenged me to a test, complimented me on my effort and then immediately gave me a

new challenge. She set up an environment for the achievement of excellence and cared enough to invite me to be part of it. And, without realizing it fully at the time, I made an important discovery. Dance is the most immediate and accessible of the arts because it involves your own body. When you learn to move your body on a note of music, it's exciting. You have taken control of your body and, by learning to do that, you discover that you can take control of your life.

I took classes with Madame Seda for six months, once a week, but at the end of spring, in June 1942, she called over my mother, my sister and me and did an unbelievably modest and generous thing. She said, "You and your sister are very talented. You should go to a better teacher." She sent us to George Balanchine's school—the School of American Ballet.

10

Within a few years, I was performing children's roles. At 15, I became part of a classical ballet company. What an extraordinary thing for a street boy from Washington Heights, with friends in gangs. Half grew up to become policemen and the other half gangsters—and I became a ballet dancer!

I had dreamed of being a doctor or an archaeologist or a priest. But by the time I was 17, I was a principal dancer performing major roles in the ballets, and by the time I was 21, I was doing movies, Broadway shows and choreography. I then married a ballerina from New York City Ballet, Carolyn George, and we were (and still are) blessed with two boys and twin daughters.

It was a joyful career that lasted four decades. That's a long time to be dancing and, inevitably, a time came when I realized that there were not many years left for me as a performer. I wasn't sure what to do next, but then I thought about how I had become a dancer, and the teachers who had graced my life. Perhaps I could engage young children, especially boys, in the magic of the arts—in dance in particular. Not necessarily to prepare them to be professional performers, but to create an awareness by giving them a chance to experience the arts. So I started National Dance Institute.

That was 13 years ago. Since then, with the help of fellow teachers and staff at NDI, I have taught dance to thousands of inner-city children. And in each class, I rediscover why teaching dance to children is so important. Each time I can use dance to help a child discover that he can control the way he moves, I am filled with joy. At a class I recently taught at P.S. 59 in Brooklyn, there was one boy who couldn't get from his right foot to his left. He was terrified. Everyone was watching. And what he had to do was so simple: take a step with his left foot on a note of music. All his classmates could do it, but he couldn't.

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He kept trying, but he kept doing it wrong until finally he was frozen, unable to move at all. I put my arm around him and said, "Let's do it together. We'll do it in slow motion." We did it. I stepped back and said, "Now do it alone, and fast." With his face twisted in concentration, he slammed his left foot down correctly on the note. He did it!

The whole class applauded. He was so excited. But I think I was even happier, because I knew what had taken place. He had discovered he could take control of his body, and from that he can learn to take control of his life. If I can open the door to show a child that that is possible, it is wonderful.

Dance is the art to express time and space. That is what our universe is about. We can hardly make a sentence without signifying some expression of distance, place or time: "See you later." "Meet you at the corner in five minutes."

Dance is the art that human beings have developed to express that we live, right now, in a world of movement and varying tempos.

Dance, as an art, has to be taught. However, when teaching, it's important to set up an environment where both the student and teacher can discover together. Never teach something you don't love and believe in. But how to set up that environment?

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When I have a new group of young students and I'm starting a class, I use Madame Seda's technique. I say, "Can you do this test? I'm going to give all 100 of you exactly 10 seconds to get off your seats and be standing and spread out all over the stage floor. And do it silently. Go!" And I start a countdown. Naturally, they run, yelling and screaming, and somehow arrive with several seconds to spare. I say, "Freeze. You all failed. You made noise, and you got there too soon. I said 'exactly 10 seconds'—not 6 or 8 or 11. Go back to your seats, and we'll do it again. And if you don't get it, we'll go back and do it again until you do. And if, at the end of the hour, you still haven't gotten it, I'm not going to teach you."

They usually get it the second time. Never have I had to do it more than three.

Demand precision, be clear and absolutely truthful. When they respond—and they will—congratulate them on the extraordinary control they have just exhibited. Why is that important? Because it's the beginning of knowing yourself, knowing that you can manage yourself if you want. And it's the beginning of dance. Once the children see that we are having a class of precision, order and respect, they are relieved, and we have a great class.

I've taught dance to Russian children, Australian children, Indian children, Chinese children, fat children, skinny children, handicapped children, groups of Australian triathletes, New York City police, senior citizens and 3-year-olds. The technique is the same everywhere, although there are cultural differences.

For example, when I was in China, I would say to the children, "I want everybody to come close and watch what I am going to do." But in China they have had to deal with following a teacher when there are masses of them. And they discovered that the way to see what the teacher does is not to move close but to move away. So 100 people moved back to watch the one—me.

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I realized they were right. How did they learn that? Thousands of years of masses of people having to follow one teacher.

There are cultural differences and there are differences among people. In any group of dancers, there are some who are ready and excel more than others. There are many reasons—genetic, environment, the teachers they had. People blossom at different times. But whatever the differences, someone admiring you, encouraging you, works so much better than the reverse. "You can do it, you are wonderful," works so much better than, "You're no good, the others are better than you, you've got to try harder." That never works.

I don’t think there are any untalented children. But I think there are those whose talents never get the chance to flower. Perhaps they were never encouraged. Perhaps no one took the time to find out how to teach them. That is a tragedy.

However, the single most terrible thing we are doing to our children, I believe, is polluting them. I don’t mean just with smog and crack, but by not teaching them the civilizing things we have taken millions of years to develop. But you cannot have a dance class without having good manners, without having respect. Dance can teach those things.

30

I think of each person as a trunk that’s up in the attic. What are you going to put in the trunk? Are you going to put in machine guns, loud noises, foul language, dirty books and ignorance? Because, if you do, that’s what is going to be left after you, that’s what your children are going to have, and that will determine the world of the future. Or are you going to fill that trunk with music, dance, poetry, literature, good manners and loving friends?

I say, fill your trunk with the best that is available to you from the wealth of human culture. Those things will nourish you and your children. You can clean up your own environment and pass it on to the next generation. That’s why I teach dance.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

Reflect back on your first journal response to this reading and compare or contrast Madame Seda with the teacher in your piece of writing.

2.

What was it, exactly, that hooked d’Amboise on ballet? Do you think these same factors would automatically engage other children in this same pursuit? Explain.

3.

D’Amboise writes that you should “never teach something you don’t love and believe in.” What’s your reaction to this rule? Based on your educational experiences, both in and out of the classroom, how many of your teachers have followed this tenet?

4.

D’Amboise also writes that when it comes to learning, encouragement works much better than criticism. Working with two or three other students, come up with specific examples to either prove or disprove this contention.

5.

At the end of this piece, d’Amboise explains the six necessities a child (the trunk) should be filled with. Choose the three of his values with which you most agree, and then add three more of your own. Be prepared to defend your choices.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.

When school budgets are trimmed, subjects in the arts are very often the first ones to be cut. Write a persuasive essay in which you argue in favor of keeping a certain art or one in which you disagree with keeping a certain art.

2.

Interview a current or former teacher in order to discover why his or her particular subject area (history, math, psychology, literature, writing, foreign languages, science,

art, music, and so on) is so crucial to every student's education. Brainstorm with peers in order to come up with four or five open-ended questions that encourage the instructor to both explain and defend his or her subject matter.

3.

Research another famous dance teacher/choreographer (for example, Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, Bob Fosse, Isadora Duncan) in order to discover this person's philosophy toward the teaching and learning of dance.

ZITKALA-SA

The School Days of an Indian Girl

Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin; 1876–1938) was born on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota; her father was white, and her mother was a full-blooded Sioux. As she describes in "The Land of Red Apples," she left the reservation at the age of eight to attend a Quaker boarding school in Wabash, Indiana. After four years, she returned home, "neither a wild Indian nor a tame one," as she writes in "Four Strange Summer." Several years later, she accepted a scholarship to the Quaker-run Earlham College and returned to Indiana, where she became an accomplished violinist. Her musical talent led to a scholarship at the Boston Conservatory of Music. In 1899 she accepted a teaching job at Carlisle Indian School. She strongly disagreed with the policies of the school and lasted there only two years. In the meantime, however, she had written articles for Harper's *and* Atlantic Monthly, *including the selections here, using the pen name Zitkala-Sa. She returned to the reservation with a contract to write a book of legends of her people. On the reservation, she met and married Captain Raymond Bonnin, a mixed-blood like herself, who worked for the Bureau of Indian Affairs. She moved with her husband to various reservations, and while they were living in Utah, Zitkala-Sa became active in Indian self-help organizations and also collaborated with composer William Hanson on an opera,* Sun Dance, *the only opera written by a Native American. In 1916, the Bonnins moved to Washington, D.C., where she became editor of the magazine of the Society for American Indians. In 1924, she coauthored* Oklahoma's Poor Rich Indians, *an exposé of robberies, land thefts, and oil-motivated murders of Native Americans. In 1926 she became a founder of the National Council of American Indians and helped secure passage of the Indian Citizenship bill and other reforms. She died in 1938, and because her husband was in the military, she is buried in Arlington National Cemetery.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.

What are your warmest memories of home and school between the ages of six and nine?

2.

Write about the most educated person you know.

———

I The Land of Red Apples

There were eighty in our party of bronzed children who were going East with the missionaries. Among us were three young braves, two tall girls, and we three little ones, Judéwin, Thowin, and I.

We had been very impatient to start on our journey to the Red Apple Country, which, we were told, lay a little beyond the great circular horizon of the Western prairie. Under a sky of rosy apples we dreamt of roaming as freely and happily as we had chased the cloud shadows on the Dakota plains. We had anticipated much pleasure from a ride on the iron horse, but the throngs of staring palefaces disturbed and troubled us.

On the train, fair women, with tottering babies on each arm, stopped their haste and scrutinized the children of absent mothers. Large men, with heavy bundles in their hands, halted near by, and riveted their glassy blue eyes upon us.

I sank deep into the corner of my seat, for I resented being watched. Directly in front of me, children who were no larger than I hung themselves upon the backs of their seats, with their bold white faces toward me. Sometimes they took their forefingers out of their mouths and pointed at my moccasined feet. Their mothers, instead of reproving such rude curiosity, looked closely at me, and attracted their children's further notice to my blanket. This embarrassed me, and kept me constantly on the verge of tears.

I sat perfectly still, with my eyes downcast, daring only now and then to shoot long glances around me. Chancing to turn to the window at my side, I was quite breathless upon seeing one familiar object. It was the telegraph pole which strode by at short paces. Very near my mother's dwelling, along the edge of a road thickly bordered with wild sunflowers, some poles like these had been planted by white men. Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it. Now I sat watching for each pole that glided by to be the last one.

In this way I had forgotten my uncomfortable surroundings, when I heard one of my comrades call out my name. I saw the missionary standing very near, tossing candies and gums into our midst. This amused us all, and we tried to see who could catch the most of the sweet-meats. The missionary's generous distribution of candies was impressed upon my memory by a disastrous result which followed. I had caught more than my share of candies and gums, and soon after our arrival at the school I had a chance to disgrace myself, which, I am ashamed to say, I did.

Though we rode several days inside of the iron horse, I do not recall a single thing about our luncheons.

It was night when we reached the school grounds. The lights from the windows of the large buildings fell upon some of the icicled trees that stood beneath them. We were led toward an open door, where the brightness of the lights within flooded out over the heads of the excited palefaces who blocked the way. My body trembled more from fear than from the snow I trod upon.

Entering the house, I stood close against the wall. The strong glaring light in the large whitewashed room dazzled my eyes. The noisy hurrying of hard shoes upon a bare wooden floor increased the whirring in my ears. My only safety seemed to be in keeping next to the wall. As I was wondering in which direction to escape from all this confusion, two warm hands grasped me firmly, and in the same moment I was tossed high in midair. A rosy-checked paleface woman caught me in her arms. I was both frightened and insulted by such trifling. I stared into her eyes, wishing her to let me stand on my feet, but she jumped me up and down with increasing enthusiasm. My mother had never made a plaything of her wee daughter. Remembering this I began to cry aloud.

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They misunderstood the cause of my tears, and placed me at a white table loaded with food. There our party were united again. As I did not hush my crying, one of the older ones whispered to me, “Wait until you are alone in the night.”
It was very little I could swallow besides my sobs, that evening.
“Oh, I want my mother and my brother Dawée! I want to go to my aunt!” I pleaded; but the ears of the palefaces could not hear me.
From the table we were taken along an upward incline of wooden boxes, which I learned afterward to call a stairway. At the top was a quite hall, dimly lighted. Many narrow beds were in one straight line down the entire length of the wall. In them lay sleeping brown faces, which peeped just out of the coverings. I was tucked into bed with one of the tall girls, because she talked to me in my mother tongue and seemed to soothe me.
I had arrived in the wonderful land of rosy skies, but I was not happy, as I had thought I should be. My long travel and the bewildering sights had exhausted me. I fell asleep, heaving deep, tired sobs. My tears were left to dry themselves in streaks, because neither my aunt nor my mother was near to wipe them away.
II<>The Cutting of My Long Hair
15
the first day in the land of the apples was a bitter-cold one; for the snow still covered the ground, and the trees were bare. A large bell rang for breakfast, it’s loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears. The annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors gave us no peace. The constant clash of harsh noises, with an undercurrent of many voices murmuring an unknown tongue, made a bedlam within which I was securely tied. And though my spirit tore itself in struggling for its lost freedom, all was useless.

A paleface woman, with white hair, came up after us. We were placed in a line of girls who were marching into the dining room. These were Indian girls, in stiff shoes and closely clinging dresses. The small girls wore sleeved aprons and shingled hair. As I walked noiselessly in my soft moccasins, I felt like sinking to the floor, for my blanket had been stripped from my shoulders. I looked hard at the Indians girls, who seemed not to care that they were even more immodestly dressed than I, in their tightly fitting clothes. While we marched in, the boys entered at an opposite door. I watched for the three young braves who came in our party. I spied them in the rear ranks, looking as uncomfortable as I felt.
A small bell was tapped, and each of the pupils drew a chair from under the table. Supposing this act meant they were to be seated, I pulled out mine and at once slipped into it from one side. But when I turned my head, I saw that I was the only one seated, and all the rest at our table remained standing. Just as I began to rise, looking shyly around to see how chairs were to be used, a second bell was sounded. All were seated at last, and I had to crawl back into my chair again. I head a man’s voice at one end of the hall, and I looked around to see him. But all the others hung their heads over their plates. As I glanced at the long chain of tables, I caught the eyes of a paleface woman upon me. Immediately I dropped my eyes, wondering why I was so keenly watched by the strange woman. The man ceased his mutterings, and then a third bell was tapped. Every one

picked up his knife and fork and began eating. I began crying instead, for by this time I was afraid to venture anything more.

But this eating by formula was not the hardest trial in that first day. Late in the morning, my friend Judéwin gave me a terrible warning. Judéwin knew a few words of English; and she had overheard the paleface woman talk about cutting our long, heavy hair. Our mothers had taught us that only unskilled warriors who were captured had their hair shingled by the enemy. Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards!

We discussed our fate some moments, and when Judéwin said, "We have to submit, because they are strong," I rebelled..

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"No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!" I answered.

I watched my chance, and when no one noticed I disappeared. I crept up the stairs quietly as I could in my squeaking shoes,—my moccasins had been exchanged for shoes. Along the hall I passed, without knowing whither I was going. Turning aside to an open door, I found a large room with three white beds in it. The windows were covered with dark green curtains, which made the room very dim. Thankful that no one was there, I directed my steps toward the corner farthest from the door. On my hands and knees I crawled under the bed, and cuddled myself in the dark corner.

From my hiding place I peered out, shuddering with fear whenever I heard footsteps nearby. Though in the hall loud voices were calling my name, and I knew that even Judéwin was searching for me, I did not open my mouth to answer. Then the steps were quickened and the voices became excited. The sounds came nearer and nearer. Woman and girls entered the room. I held my breath, and watched them open closet doors and peep behind large trunks. Some one threw up the curtains, and the room was filled with sudden light. What caused them to stoop and look under the bed I do not know. I remember being dragged out, though I resisted by kicking and scratching wildly. In spite of myself, I was carried downstairs and tied fast in a chair.

I cried aloud, shaking my head all the while until I felt the cold blades of the scissors against my neck, and heard them gnaw off one of my thick braids. The I lost my spirit. Since the day I was taken from my mother I had suffered extreme indignities. People had stared at me. I had been tossed about in the air like a wooden puppet. And now my long hair was shingled like a coward's! In my anguish I moaned for my mother, but no one came to comfort me. Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do: for Now I was only one of many little animals drive by a herder. . . .[1];s

VI Four Stranger Summers

After my first three years of school, I roamed again in the Western country through four strange summers.

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During this time I seemed to hang in the heart of chaos, beyond the touch or voice of human aid. My brother, being almost ten years my senior, did not quite understand my feelings. My mother had never gone inside of a schoolhouse, and so she was not capable of comforting her daughter who could read and write. Even nature seemed to have no place for me. I was neither a week girl nor a tall one; neither a wild Indian nor a tame one. This deplorable situation was the effect of my brief course in the East, and the unsatisfactory "tenth" in a girl's years.

It was under these trying conditions that, one bright afternoon, as I saw restless and unhappy in my mother's cabin, I caught the sound of the spirited step of my brother's pony on the road which passed by our dwelling. Soon I heard the wheels of a light buckboard, and Dawée familiar "Ho!" to his pony. He alighted upon the bare ground in front of our house. Tying his pony to one of the projecting corner logs of the low-roofed cottage, he stepped upon the wooden doorstep.

I met him there with a hurried greeting, and, as I passed by, he looked a quiet "What?" into my eyes.

When he began talking with my mother, I slipped the rope from the pony's bridle. Seizing the reins and bracing my feet against the dashboard, I wheeled around in an instant. The pony was ever ready to try his speed. Looking backward, I saw Dawée waving his hand to me. I turned with the curve in the road and disappeared. I followed the winding road which crawled upward between the bases of little hillocks. Deep water-worn ditches ran parallel on either side. A strong wind blew against my cheeks and fluttered my sleeves. The pony reached the top of the highest hill, and began an even race on level lands. There was nothing moving within that great circular horizon of the Dakota prairies save the tall grasses, over which the wind blew and rolled off in long, shadowy waves.

Within this vast wigwam of blue and green I rode reckless and insignificant. It satisfied my small consciousness to see the white foam fly from the pony's mouth.

Suddenly, out of the earth a coyote came forth at a swinging trot that was taking the cunning thief toward the hills and the village beyond. Upon the moment's impulse, I gave him a long chase and a wholesome fright. As I turned away to go back to the village, the wolf sank down upon his haunches for a rest, for it was a hot summer day; and as I drove slowly homeward, I saw his sharp nose still pointed at me, until I vanished below the margin of the hilltops.

In a little while I came in sight of my mother's house. Dawée stood in the yard, laughing at an old warrior who was pointing his forefinger, and again waving his whole hand, toward the hills. With his blanket drawn over one shoulder, he talked and motioned excitedly. Dawée turned the old man by the shoulder and pointed me out to him.

"Oh han!" (Oh yes) the warrior muttered, and went his way. He had climbed the top of his favorite barren hill to survey the surrounding prairies, when he spied my chase after the coyote. His keen eyes recognized the pony and driver. At once uneasy for my safety, he had come running to my mother's cabin to give her warning. I did not appreciate his kindly interest, for there was an unrest gnawing at my heart.

As soon as he went away, I asked Dawée about something else.

"No, my baby sister. I cannot take you with me to the party to-night," he replied. Though I was not far from fifteen, and I felt that before long I should enjoy all the privileges of my tall cousin, Dawée persisted in calling me his baby sister.

That moonlight night, I cried in my mother's presence when I heard the jolly young people pass by our cottage. There were no more young braves in blankets and eagle plumes, nor Indian maids with prettily painted cheeks. They had gone three years to school in the East, and had become civilized. The young men wore the white man's coat and trousers, with bright neckties. The girls wore tight muslin dresses, with ribbons at neck and waist. At these gatherings they talked English. I could speak English almost as

well as my brother, but I was not properly dressed to be taken along. I had no hat, no ribbons, and no close-fitting gown. Since my return from school I had thrown away my shoes, and wore again the soft moccasins.

While Dawée was busily preparing to go I controlled my tears. But when I heard him bounding away on his pony, I buried my face in my arms and cried hot tears.

My mother was troubled by my unhappiness. Coming to my side, she offered me the only printed matter we had in our home. It was an Indian Bible, given her some years ago by a missionary. She tried to console me. "Here, my child, are the white man's papers. Read a little from them," she said most piously.

I took it from her hand, for her sake; but my enraged spirit felt more like burning the book, which afforded me no help, and was a perfect delusion to my mother. I did not read it, but laid it unopened on the floor, where I sat on my feet. The dim yellow light of the braided muslin burning in a small vessel of oil flickered and sizzled in the awful silent storm which followed my rejection of the Bible.

Now my wrath against the fates consumed my tears before they reached my eyes. I sat stony, with a bowed head. My mother threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and stepped out into the night.

After an uncertain solitude, I was suddenly aroused by a loud cry piercing the night. It was my mother's voice wailing among the barren hills which held the bones of buried warriors. She called aloud for her brothers' spirits to support her in her helpless misery. My fingers grew icy cold, as I realized that my unstrained tears had betrayed my suffering to her, and she was grieving for me.

Before she returned, though I knew she was on her way, for she had ceased her weeping, I extinguished the light, and leaned my head on the window sill.

Many schemes of running away from my surroundings hovered about in my mind. A few more moons of such a turmoil drove me away to the Eastern school. I rode on the white man's iron steed, thinking it would bring me back to my mother in a few winters, when I should be grown tall, and there would be congenial friends awaiting me. . . .

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What is your overall reaction to this piece? Did you enjoy it? Did you find it depressing? Could you connect with it in any way? Explain.

2.
Make a list of the sensory details in paragraphs 9 and 16. What do these details reveal about the young girl and the author?

3.
If you were to design a cover for this piece, what image would you choose and what colors would you use? Explain why.

4.
Through the experience of being taken off the reservation, what has the young Indian girl gained? What has she lost?

5.
What is at the heart of the girl's discontent during the four years she spends back on the reservation?

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Research the current conditions on American Indian reservations, including the educational system and the success of the students there.
2.
Write this event from the Indian mother's point of view.
3.
Write about a time when you left home and ventured into a place that was unfamiliar to you. Compare and contrast your experience with Zitkala-Sa's.

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DAVID THOMAS

The mind of Man

Writer and journalist David Thomas (born in 1959) was the editor of the famous English periodical Punch *from 1989 until 1992. The following essay about gender differences in academic performance originally appeared in his book* Not Guilty: The Case in Defense of Men *(1993).*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Describe your favorite teacher in elementary school. Include as many details as you can remember to give an exact portrait of this person and his or her actions and attitude.
2.
What do you think are the basic differences between boys and girls in grade school?

———

An old calypso song states that "Man Smart, Woman Smarter," but it is generally agreed by most researchers than men and women are indivisible in terms of their average overall intelligence. In *A Question of Sex,* Dr. John Nicholson summarizes the history of research into intelligence, much of which ad presumed the intellectual superiority of men. He concludes with a sentence from which there has been little subsequent dissent: "The most important fact is that men are not more intelligent than women—the average men's IQ score is indistinguishable from that of the average woman." Yet, as Dr. Nicholson points out with the aid of a few simple experiments, the sexes do differ in the types of mental tasks at which they excel.

In the words of a *Time* magazine cover story, published in January 1992, "Psychology tests consistently support the notion that men and women perceive the world in subtly different ways. Males excel at rotating three-dimensional objects in their head. Females prove better at reading the emotions of people in photographs. A growing number of scientists believe the discrepancies reflect functional differences in the brains of men and women. . .some misunderstanding between the sexes may have more to do with crossed wiring than cross-purposes."

Women are also better at verbal tasks. If given two minutes in which to come up with as many synonyms as possible for a series of words, they will, on the whole, score better than men. In both of these tests, however, some individuals will do much better or worse than their sex suggests that they "ought" to.

Do we, however, make the best of what nature has provided when the time comes to educate our young? Over the last few years, nationwide school exam results have shown

an increasing gap between the performances of girls and boys, in the girls' favor. Many more boys than girls leave school without any form of qualification. And amongst those who do pass GCSE and A-Level exams, girls are getting the higher grades. The introduction of course work into the GCSE syllabus appears to favor girls, who tend to be diligent and less rebellious. Boys appear to prefer the one-off competition of the examination hall. These preferences may be due, in part, to differences in the male and female brain, which will be discussed anon. However, since white working-class boys now score more poorly in England and Wales than almost any other racial or sexual grouping, and since highly privileged public schoolboys can be coached and coaxed into achieving astonishingly high marks, the possibility must be considered that there are social forces at work.

5

Much has been written in the past about the difficulties girls face in mixed classrooms. It has always been assumed that boys tend to speak up more forcefully than girls, and tend to be spoken to more frequently by teachers. If so, this reflects life in society as a whole. In both Britain and America, researchers have found that a woman who speaks as much as a man in a conversation, class or meeting will be thought, by both male and female observers, to have been hectoring and domineering: we are, quite simply, used to men taking the lion's share of conversation.

Recently, however, suggestions have been made that question this view of the classroom. At kindergarten and primary-school level, in which little girls out-perform the boys, the vast majority of teachers are female. Surveys by the now-defunct Inner London Education Authority showed that women teachers consistently praised girls more than boys, and equally consistently criticized the boys' behavior, often regarding it as a serious problem requiring remedial treatment. In the words of Tony Mooney, a secondary-school headmaster, writing in the *Independent on Sunday:* "Women teachers find boys too noisy, too aggressive, too boisterous. Unconsciously or not, they consistently reinforce and reward more 'feminine' behavior. If all this is true, it is understandable that boys should not be as advanced as girls in the hands of women junior school teachers. There is a direct relationship between a child's academic achievement and a favorable response from the teacher."

Mooney was first altered to this possibility by the behavior of his own son, whose performance and self-confidence at school altered markedly when he was taught by a woman, rather than a man. When the boy's mother asked him why this should be so, he replied, "Because the men teachers never shout at me as much as the women teachers."

Research evidence, from an experiment at the University of California, Los Angeles, appeared to support Mooney's anecdotal experience: "Seventy-two boys and sixty girls at kindergarten. . .learned reading with a self-teaching machine. There were no differences between the sexes in their reactions to the mechanical gadgetry. Yet when the girls were tested on their reading progress they scored lower than the boys. Then the children were placed under the normal classroom instruction of women teachers. The children were tested again on the words they had been taught by the teacher. This time the boys' scores were inferior to the girls'."

Mooney noted that boys' exam results at secondary-school were declining just as the number of women secondary-school teachers was increasing. Boys, however, continued to out-perform girls in scientific and technical subjects where teaching was still

dominated by men. The issue here is not just the favoritism that teachers may show to pupils of their own sex, but the instinctive understanding that an adult will enjoy with a child who is going through a process which he or she went though too.

10

The notion that boys might in some way be disadvantaged was too shocking for at least one reader of Mooney's article. As far as Christine Cosker—a correspondent to the *Independent on Sunday's* letters page—was concerned, it was partly the fault of the boys themselves. "If girls achieve higher standards than boys," she wrote, "it is not the result of sympathetic female teachers; it is that boys fail to be motivated because of their attitude to women. Boys' early experience is almost entirely one of a society which regards women's traditional roles as trivial, dull and second-rate and dismisses their opinions. If girls have a positive role model in the female teacher, they will do better than boys. But if boys, unencumbered by society's prejudices, valued their female teachers, then their progress would match that of girls."

It is worth examining some of the prejudices revealed by this letter in some detail, because I suspect that they would be shared by a broad swathe of supposedly progressive opinion.

In the first place, note that she has found it impossible to accept that female teachers could, in any way, be responsible for the situation. It has to be the fault of males and an anti-female social order. Specifically, boys are to be blamed for their own disadvantages. Secondly, she has misinterpreted the article. Mr. Mooney indicated that his son's problem was not that he did not value his teacher, but that she did not value him. He was frightened of her because she shouted at him.

Thirdly, although it is extremely important to primary-school-aged boys not to be seen to act in any way that might be interpreted as cissy or girly, that is not necessarily to say that they regard women's traditional roles as "trival, dull and second-rate." The most traditional role that women have is to be a mother. And the mother of a small boy is still one of the two most important people in his life. In the experience of most "traditional" housewives I know, it is other, career-minded women who hold them in the greatest contempt. Their children value them above all else.

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Finally, observe the double standard applied to girls and boys. Cosker maintains, and few would disagree, that girls benefit from a "positive role model." there is, however, no need for boys to be given the same benefit. Instead, they must pull their socks up and change their attitudes. Heaven forbid that they should be given any consideration or compassion. Heaven forbid that the prejudices of the new age should be challenged. If you ever doubted that feminists have taken over from apoplectic old colonels as the great reactionaries of society, just read this letter.

Alternatively, look at the facts. One of the few generally accepted differences between boys and girls is that boys are, across all cultures, much more boisterous and overtly competitive than girls. Boys enjoy games of rough and tumble. They play with guns, real or imaginary. They seek out physical competition, whether through sport or informal bouts of playground warfare. This makes them harder to control than girls, particularly if, as is the case in the majority of state primary schools in this country, they are being taught in an open-plan classroom. Janet Daley, writing in the *Independent*, has observed that "Anyone who visits an open-plan infant-school classroom, where the children

organize much of their own time, will notice a pattern. Groups of little girls will be absorbed in quite orderly work or play. . .requiring little supervision. A few of the boys will be engrossed in solitary creative or constructive activity. A large number of children will be noisily participating in some loosely directed project which needs guidance and some of those will be boys who are persistently disruptive and out of control."

Daley ascribes this behavior to the fact that the nurological development of boys is slower than that of girls, and thus boys are "physically and mentally unstable for much of their childhood and adolescence." Are they? Or does Ms. Daley share a prejudice—unintended, no doubt—with the boys' teachers, who are trained to define the relative maturity of their charges by their ability to sit quietly and be attentive? By those standards, boys may appear backward, troublesome and even threatening. All that has happened, however, is that we are criticizing boys for their failure to be more like girls.

It is for some time been recognized that girls do better in single-sex education, where their particular needs can be catered for exclusively. Having spent ten years in single-sex boarding-school education, I have mixed feelings about its benefits for boys, but I am absolutely certain that there are great social benefits to be had from recognizing that boys may need specially tailored treatment to at least as great an extent as their sisters (a point with which Janet Daley concurs).

In the years before puberty, boys are, I suspect, perfectly happy to be left to themselves. At the age of eleven or twelve, I doubt whether I would have been at all pleased to see girls getting in the way of my games of football, or intruding in the serious business of building huts and encampments in the woods behind the school. By my teens, however, I was painfully aware of the distorting effect that an all-male institution was having on my own emotional development and that of my classmates.

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Despite that, however, I was taught in a system that was designed to bring the best out of boys, intellectually, creatively and on the sports field. It was certainly a world away from the non-achieving atmosphere that has been prevalent throughout much of English state education over the last twenty years. Of course, the boys with whom I was educated came from privileged backgrounds. But one of the mistakes made by critics of the public-school system is to underestimate the efficiency, not to say ruthlessness, with which its pupils are programmed to perform to the best of their ability. We were constantly tested, constantly ranked and constantly urged to do better. And, on reflection, I suspect that it is better to accept that boys are not, on the whole, docile creatures who wish to live in harmony with one another, but are, instead, highly competitive, physically energetic creatures who hunt in packs.

Some boys will suffer in that sort of environment, and they need to be respected and protected. I can remember all too well what it is like to be on the receiving end of bullying and oppression, But I also know that there is no point in deciding that, since traditional male behavior is politically unacceptable, boys must somehow be conditioned to behave in ways that are not natural to them. that process leads only to disaster.

Boys whose lives are led without structure and discipline do not find themselves liberated. Instead they become bored, frustrated and maladaptive. They fight. They misbehave and they perform badly, both at school and thereafter. However much it might want boys to change, any society that wants to limit the antisocial behavior of young men should start by accepting the way they are. Then it should do everything possible to make

sure that their energies are directed towards good, rather than evil. When Yoda sat on his rock in *The Empire Strikes Back* and told Luke Skywalker that he had to choose between the dark force and the light, he knew what he was talking about.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What are your warmest memories of home and school between the ages of six and nine?
2.
Write about the most educated person you know.

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Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Narrate a scene from your own classroom experience that shows, without telling, how teachers treat male and female students differently.
2.
Either working alone or working with a small group, conduct several classroom observations in which you take note of the interactions between teachers and their students. Write up your findings and give an oral report to your classmates.
3.
Find another article from a credible source such as an educational journal that focuses on how girls are treated in the classroom. Compare and contrast this article with Thomas's piece.

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A New Kind of Street Smarts

BENJAMIN PIMENTEL

Benjamin Pimentel grew up in Cubao, Quezon City, Philippines before moving to San Francisco. He received his master's degree in journalism from the University of California Berkeley. Pimentel has contributed to many U.S. publications and now works at a staff writer for the San Francisco Chronicle.

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Write about five things that really make you angry. Do you think you will still be angry about these things ten years from now? Explain.
2.
React to this statement by Malcolm X: "If you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem."

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Two years ago, Lian Cheun and other Oakland youths began poring over their school district's records to find out why so many students were being suspended.
They found an answer and got the attention of school officials: Most students were being booted from class for offenses such as rolling their eyes, the study showed. In response, school officials are vowing to reduce suspensions by 20 percent.

The investigation by People United for a Better Oakland, a community organization, taught Cheun that the power of information is not just available to those with advanced degrees to specialized skills.

"It's only after you try that you realize that there's so much information you can get," the 19-year-old said. "It doesn't take a Ph.D. to do research. It doesn't take a scientist to look at a lot of numbers to see that something is wrong."

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The Oakland project is an example of how community groups are expanding their role as watchdogs by hunting down information to solve problems.

Throughout the Bay Area and across the nation, such groups are taking on the tasks of academics and investigative reporters, conducting interviews, crunching numbers and digging through public records.

;ls In San Francisco, a group of teenagers working with the Youth Leadership Institute, a community-based think-tank, spent a month in 1997 tracking the number of students shopping at neighborhood stores near their schools and how much they were bombarded by alcohol and tobacco advertisements in those stores. Their findings prompted a Board of Supervisors resolution earlier this year condemning such advertising.

;ls In the city's Bayview-Hunter's Point district, residents have been working with city officials, doctors and academics since 1996 to determine the incidence of asthma in the community. their results have led to more city funding for services and education.

;ls In Richmond, a grassroots organization known as the Laotian Organizing Project helped expose the inadequacy of Contra Costa Country's emergency warning system. The telephone warnings in English routinely failed to alert the city's Laotian residents, most of whom do not speak English, in disasters such as the March fire at the Chevron refinery. Their work prompted county leaders this week to begin putting together a multilingual warning system.

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Unlike traditional research, in which academics and professionals call the shots, community-based research involves residents who take part, and even take the lead, in determining what needs to be investigated and what to do with the information. In most cases, they use data to address a pressing community problem.

Funding from federal and private foundations for such projects has tripled during the past four years to about $20 million a year, said Richard Sclove of Loka Institute, a Massachusetts think-tank, who is a coauthor of a 1998 study on the trend.

In East Oakland, the two-year investigation of student suspensions found that 10,000 students had been suspended, most of them for "defiance of authority."

"People were getting suspended for little things like rolling their eyes or smacking their teeth or not opening a book, at the expense of their education," Cheun said.

While Oakland school administrators said the report overstated the number of students given suspensions, the school board convened a task force that included the youths who did the research. Among the changes being studied are defining what conduct falls under "defiance of authority" and starting a program in which suspended students could get free legal advice.

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“I really applaud the report, and we will use it as a basis for establishing goals for the coming year,” said Oakland school board President Noel Gallo. He said the district plans to come up with clearer policies and to reduce suspensions by 20 percent.

Such community-based investigations typically are sparked by either an organization’s or individual’s concern. For example, the studies on asthma in San Francisco’s Bayview district began after a principal and a counselor at George Washington Carver Elementary School observed that more students were using inhalers.

Community groups often use public information, commission scientific surveys or gather data themselves by knocking on doors.

“We went to corner stores, and we mapped out how many corner stores there were in one neighborhood and how many kids came to those stores after school,” said Gustavo Aguilar, 19, a member of the youth group that investigated convenience stores selling alcohol and tobacco. “In some stores, they had more than 100 posters advertising for alcohol.”

In 1991, a group of Oakland parents worried about the effects of lead on their children worked with People United for a Better Oakland. Together, the group commissioned tests of lead levels in public gardens and playgrounds, researched programs designed to reduce lead poisoning and pushed county officials to create the Alameda County Lead Poisoning Prevention Program.

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The program, which began in 1992, has screened more than 10,000 children.

“If we (PUEBLO) had not done the research, that (anti-lead poisoning) program would not exist,” said Karleen Lloyd, an Oakland mother who joined the campaign. “Before we make any demands on an institution, we make sure the demands we are making are donable. Research is essential.”

However, some critics question the ability of community groups to conduct a credible study or suspect that advocates are manipulating data to suit a specific agenda.

“People with axes to grind might push the research in directions which aren’t satisfactory,” said Stanley Rothman, director of the Center for the Study of Social and Political Change at Smith College in Massachusetts.

But Dr. Paul Sharek, a medical professor at the University of California at San Francisco who is involved in the Bayview asthma study, said community groups make a research project more meaningful, especially in poor and neglected neighborhoods.

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“There’s a lot of passion for it in an area that historically has been overlooked,” he said.

Steven Schwartzberg, director of the alameda Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, said he first considered the Oakland community group to be a troublemaker. But he grew to admire its ability to investigate and identify a community problem.

“They always do their homework,” he said. “They know the community, and the outcome is much more powerful.”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.

In general, what conclusions can you draw about the types of projects that are started through grassroots organizations?

2.

What reasons can you offer for such programs being started up by local residents as opposed to state or government officials?
3.
Although the problems of starting up a grassroots organization are not highlighted in this piece, what ones might arise in each one of the cases cited here?
4.
What are the components that would make a grassroots campaign successful?
5.
Which one of the campaigns listed here would you be most apt to support? Explain.
Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.
Reflect back on the first prereading response, and choose one topic that angers you about which you could start your own campaign. Write a proposal for this campaign that includes the problem, who it affects, why it matters, and the possible solutions.
2.
Working with two or three other students, select a problem on which you, too, could do hands-on research. Conduct your research and write a report that details your findings, your method, and your conclusions.
3.
Research an organization with which you would be willing to volunteer your time. Find out this organization's origins, its success or failures from the beginning to the present, and the problem it is intent on solving.

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DAVID THOMAS
The Mind of Man
Writer and journalist David Thomas (born in 1959) was the editor of the famous English periodical Punch *from 1989 until 1992. The following essay about gender differences in academic performance originally appeared in his book* Not Guilty: The Case in Defense of Men *(1993).*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Describe your favorite teacher in elementary school. Include as many details as you can remember to give an exact portrait of this person and his or her actions and attitude.
2.
What do you think are the basic differences between boys and girls in grade school?

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An old calypso song states that "Man Smart, Woman Smarter," but it is generally agreed by most researchers that men and women are indivisible in terms of their average overall intelligence. In *A Question of Sex,* Dr. John Nicholson summarizes the history of research into intelligence, much of which had presumed the intellectual superiority of men. He concludes with a sentence from which there has been little subsequent dissent: "The most important fact is that men are not more intelligent than women—the average man's IQ score is indistinguishable from that of the average woman." Yet, as Dr. Nicholson points

out with the aid of a few simple experiments, the sexes do differ in the types of mental tasks at which they excel.

In the words of a *Time* magazine cover story, published in January 1992, "Psychology tests consistently support the notion that men and women perceive the world in subtly different ways. Males excel at rotating three-dimensional objects in their head. Females prove better at reading the emotions of people in photographs. A growing number of scientists believe the discrepancies reflect functional differences in the brains of men and women . . . some misunderstandings between the sexes may have more to do with crossed wiring than cross-purposes."

Women are also better at verbal tasks. If given two minutes in which to come up with as many synonyms as possible for a series of words, they will, on the whole, score better than men. In both of these tests, however, some individuals will do much better or worse than their sex suggests that they "ought" to.

Do we, however, make the best of what nature has provided when the time comes to educate our young? Over the last few years, nationwide school exam results have shown an increasing gap between the performances of girls and boys, in the girls' favor. Many more boys than girls leave school without any form of qualification. And amongst those who do pass GCSE and A-Level exams, girls are getting the higher grades. The introduction of course work into the GCSE syllabus appears to favor girls, who tend to be diligent and less rebellious. Boys appear to prefer the one-off competition of the examination hall. These preferences may be due, in part, to differences in the male and female brain, which will be discussed anon. However, since white working-class boys now score more poorly in England and Wales than almost any other racial or sexual grouping, and since highly privileged public schoolboys can be coached and coaxed into achieving astonishingly high marks, the possibility must be considered that there are social forces at work.

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Much has been written in the past about the difficulties girls face in mixed classrooms. It has always been assumed that boys tend to speak up more forcefully than girls, and tend to be spoken to more frequently by teachers. If so, this reflects life in society as a whole. In both Britain and America, researchers have found that a woman who speaks as much as a man in a conversation, class or meeting will be thought, by both male and female observers, to have been hectoring and domineering: we are, quite simply, used to men taking the lion's share of conversation.

Recently, however, suggestions have been made that question this view of the classroom. At kindergarten and primary-school level, in which little girls out-perform the boys, the vast majority of teachers are female. Surveys by the now-defunct Inner London Education Authority showed that women teachers consistently praised girls more than boys, and equally consistently criticized the boys' behavior, often regarding it as a serious problem requiring remedial treatment. In the words of Tony Mooney, a secondary-school headmaster, writing in the *Independent on Sunday:* "Women teachers find boys too noisy, too aggressive, too boisterous. Unconsciously or not, they consistently reinforce and reward more 'feminine' behavior. If all this is true, it is understandable that boys should not be as advanced as girls in the hands of women junior school teachers. There is a direct relationship between a child's academic achievement and a favorable response from the teacher."

Mooney was first alerted to this possibility by the behavior of his own son, whose performance and self-confidence at school altered markedly when he was taught by a woman, rather than a man. When the boy's mother asked him why this should be so, he replied, "Because the men teachers never shout at me as much as the women teachers."
Research evidence, from an experiment at the University of California, Los Angeles, appeared to support Mooney's anecdotal experience: "Seventy-two boys and sixty girls at kindergarten . . . learned reading with a self-teaching machine. There were no differences between the sexes in their reactions to the mechanical gadgetry. Yet when the girls were tested on their reading progress they scored lower than the boys. Then the children were placed under the normal classroom instruction of women teachers. The children were tested again on the words they had been taught by the teacher. This time the boys' scores were inferior to the girls'."
Mooney noted that boys' exam results at secondary-school were declining just as the number of women secondary-school teachers was increasing. Boys, however, continued to out-perform girls in scientific and technical subjects where teaching was still dominated by men. The issue here is not just the favoritism that teachers may show to pupils of their own sex, but the instinctive understanding that an adult will enjoy with a child who is going through a process which he or she went though too.
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The notion that boys might in some way be disadvantaged was too shocking for at least one reader of Mooney's article. As far as Christine Cosker—a correspondent to the *Independent on Sunday*'s letters page—was concerned, it was partly the fault of the boys themselves. "If girls achieve higher standards than boys," she wrote, "it is not the result of sympathetic female teachers: it is that boys fail to be motivated because of their attitude to women. Boys' early experience is almost entirely one of a society which regards women's traditional roles as trivial, dull and second-rate and dismisses their opinions. If girls have a positive role model in the female teacher, they will do better than boys. But if boys, unencumbered by society's prejudices, valued their female teachers, then their progress would match that of girls."
It is worth examining some of the prejudices revealed by this letter in some detail, because I suspect that they would be shared by a broad swath of supposedly progressive opinion.
In the first place, note that she has found it impossible to accept that female teachers could, in any way, be responsible for the situation. It has to be the fault of males and an anti-female social order. Specifically, boys are to be blamed for their own disadvantages.
Secondly, she has misinterpreted the article. Mr. Mooney indicated that his son's problem was not that he did not value his teacher, but that she did not value him. He was frightened of her because she shouted at him.
Thirdly, although it is extremely important to primary-school-aged boys not to be seen to act in any way that might be interpreted as sissy or girly, that is not necessarily to say that they regard women's traditional roles as "trival, dull and second-rate." The most traditional role that women have is to be a mother. And the mother of a small boy is still one of the two most important people in his life. In the experience of most "traditional" housewives I know, it is other, career-minded women who hold them in the greatest contempt. Their children value them above all else.
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Finally, observe the double standard applied to girls and boys. Cosker maintains, and few would disagree, that girls benefit from a "positive role model." There is, however, no need for boys to be given the same benefit. Instead, they must pull their socks up and change their attitudes. Heaven forbid that they should be given any consideration or compassion. Heaven forbid that the prejudices of the new age should be challenged. If you ever doubted that feminists have taken over from apoplectic old colonels as the great reactionaries of society, just read this letter.

Alternatively, look at the facts. One of the few generally accepted differences between boys and girls is that boys are, across all cultures, much more boisterous and overtly competitive than girls. Boys enjoy games of rough and tumble. They play with guns, real or imaginary. They seek out physical competition, whether through sport or informal bouts of playground warfare. This makes them harder to control than girls, particularly if, as is the case in the majority of state primary schools in this country, they are being taught in an open-plan classroom. Janet Daley, writing in the *Independent*, has observed that "Anyone who visits an open-plan infant-school classroom, where the children organize much of their own time, will notice a pattern. Groups of little girls will be absorbed in quite orderly work or play . . . requiring little supervision. A few of the boys will be engrossed in solitary creative or constructive activity. A large number of children will be noisily participating in some loosely directed project which needs guidance and some of those will be boys who are persistently disruptive and out of control."

Daley ascribes this behavior to the fact that the neurological development of boys is slower than that of girls, and thus boys are "physically and mentally unstable for much of their childhood and adolescence." Are they? Or does Ms. Daley share a prejudice—unintended, no doubt—with the boys' teachers, who are trained to define the relative maturity of their charges by their ability to sit quietly and be attentive? By those standards, boys may appear backward, troublesome and even threatening. All that has happened, however, is that we are criticizing boys for their failure to be more like girls.

It has for some time been recognized that girls do better in single-sex education, where their particular needs can be catered for exclusively. Having spent ten years in single-sex boarding-school education, I have mixed feelings about its benefits for boys, but I am absolutely certain that there are great social benefits to be had from recognizing that boys may need specially tailored treatment to at least as great an extent as their sisters (a point with which Janet Daley concurs).

In the years before puberty, boys are, I suspect, perfectly happy to be left to themselves. At the age of eleven or twelve, I doubt whether I would have been at all pleased to see girls getting in the way of my games of football, or intruding in the serious business of building huts and encampments in the woods behind the school. By my teens, however, I was painfully aware of the distorting effect that an all-male institution was having on my own emotional development and that of my classmates.

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Despite that, however, I was taught in a system that was designed to bring the best out of boys, intellectually, creatively and on the sports field. It was certainly a world away from the non-achieving atmosphere that has been prevalent throughout much of English state education over the last twenty years. Of course, the boys with whom I was educated came from privileged backgrounds. But one of the mistakes made by critics of the public-school system is to underestimate the efficiency, not to say ruthlessness, with which its

pupils are programmed to perform to the best of their ability. We were constantly tested, constantly ranked and constantly urged to do better. And, on reflection, I suspect that it is better to accept that boys are not, on the whole, docile creatures who wish to live in harmony with one another, but are, instead, highly competitive, physically energetic creatures who hunt in packs.

Some boys will suffer in that sort of environment, and they need to be respected and protected. I can remember all too well what it is like to be on the receiving end of bullying and oppression. But I also know that there is no point in deciding that, since traditional male behavior is politically unacceptable, boys must somehow be conditioned to behave in ways that are not natural to them. That process leads only to disaster.

Boys whose lives are led without structure and discipline do not find themselves liberated. Instead they become bored, frustrated and maladaptive. They fight. They misbehave and they perform badly, both at school and thereafter. However much it might want boys to change, any society that wants to limit the antisocial behavior of young men should start by accepting the way they are. Then it should do everything possible to make sure that their energies are directed towards good, rather than evil. When Yoda sat on his rock in *The Empire Strikes Back* and told Luke Skywalker that he had to choose between the dark force and the light, he knew what he was talking about.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
In your own words, what is the main point that Thomas is making in this piece? How relevant or true do you believe this point to be?
2.
On what sources does Thomas primarily rely? How reliable do you find these sources to be?
3.
Find three places where statistics and facts could add to the strength of Thomas's argument.
4.
Who is Tony Mooney, and is he a credible source? Why or why not?
5.
What arguments do you support in Cosker's response to Mooney? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Narrate a scene from your own classroom experience that shows, without telling, how teachers treat male and female students differently.
2.
Either working alone or working with a small group, conduct several classroom observations in which you take note of the interactions between teachers and their students. Write up your findings and give an oral report to your classmates.
3.
Find another article from a credible source such as an educational journal that focuses on how girls are treated in the classroom. Compare and contrast this article with Thomas's piece.

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BENJAMIN PIMENTEL
A New Kind of Street Smarts
Benjamin Pimentel grew up in Cubao, Quezon City, Philippines before moving to San Francisco. He received his master's degree in journalism from the University of California–Berkeley. Pimentel has contributed to many U.S. publications and now works as a staff writer for the San Francisco Chronicle.
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2.
React to this statement by Malcolm X: "If you're not part of the solution, then you're part of the problem."

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They found an answer and got the attention of school officials: Most students were being booted from class for offenses such as rolling their eyes, the study showed. In response, school officials are vowing to reduce suspensions by 20 percent.
The investigation by People United for a Better Oakland, a community organization, taught Cheun that the power of information is not just available to those with advanced degrees or specialized skills.
"It's only after you try that you realize that there's so much information you can get," the 19-year-old said. "It doesn't take a Ph.D. to do research. It doesn't take a scientist to look at a lot of numbers to see that something is wrong."
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"People were getting suspended for little things like rolling their eyes or smacking their teeth or not opening a book, at the expense of their education," Cheun said.

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"I really applaud the report, and we will use it as a basis for establishing goals for the coming year," said Oakland school board President Noel Gallo. He said the district plans to come up with clearer policies and to reduce suspensions by 20 percent.

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"There's a lot of passion for it in an area that historically has been overlooked," he said. Steven Schwartzberg, director of the Alameda Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, said he first considered the Oakland community group to be a troublemaker. But he grew to admire its ability to investigate and identify a community problem.

"They always do their homework," he said. "They know the community, and the outcome is much more powerful."

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
In general, what conclusions can you draw about the types of projects that are started through grassroots organizations?

2.
What reasons can you offer for such programs being started up by local residents as opposed to state or government officials?

3.
Although the problems of starting up a grassroots organization are not highlighted in this piece, what ones might arise in each one of the cases cited here?

4.
What are the components that would make a grassroots campaign successful?

5.
Which one of the campaigns listed here would you be most apt to support? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Writing and Thinking

1.
Reflect back on the first prereading response, and choose one topic that angers you about which you could start your own campaign. Write a proposal for this campaign that includes the problem, who it affects, why it matters, and the possible solutions.

2.
Working with two or three other students, select a problem on which you, too, could do hands-on research. Conduct your research and write a report that details your findings, your method, and your conclusions.

3.
Research an organization with which you would be willing to volunteer your time. Find out this organization's origins, its success or failures from the beginning to the present, and the problem it is intent on solving.

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DANNY SANTIAGO

Famous All Over Town

Danny Santiago was a pen name of Daniel James (1911–1988), a Hollywood screenwriter and playwright who was blacklisted during the 1950s. James was born to a wealthy family in Kansas City, Missouri, and after he earned a bachelor's degree from Yale in 1933, he began writing plays. In 1940 he wrote the screenplay for The Great Dictator *with Charlie Chaplin. During the 1940s, James and his wife were members of the Communist Party, and in 1951 he was called to testify before the House Un-American Activities Committee. The Jameses lived in a Latino neighborhood in Los Angeles, and in 1948 they began working with the teenagers there and became immersed in the community. Using the pseudonym of Danny Santiago, James began writing short stories about daily life in such a community and, with the help of author John Gregory Dunne, was able to get them published in popular Latino and Anglo magazines, including* Redbook *and* Playboy. *In 1976 he completed the novel* Famous All Over Town *(the source of the selection here), which was published in 1983 to very positive reviews. However, the discovery that the author was actually an Anglo was the source of much controversy. The editor of a Latino magazine that had published some of his short stories felt he had been deceived. Other members of the literary community defended him; Richard Rodriguez, for example, wrote that James's use of an ethnic pen name was "certainly understandable" given some people's "dangerous assumptions" that only members of a particular group can write about that group.*

Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
If you could make one resolution today that would help you be a better person, what would you do, and what obstacles might you encounter as you turn over this new leaf?
2.
What do you think it takes to be a good junior high teacher in an inner city public school? Is this a position you would like to have? Why or why not?
3.
Write a list for any one of the following topics: How to Succeed in High School, How to Impress Your Teachers, or How to Play the Classroom Game.

———

Next day I woke up before the alarm clock. Daylight Savings was almost over, the sun was tardy and the house was black but I woke up happy because today I would turn over my New Leaf. I was disgusted with the old one.

What about that zip gun, man? you might be wondering. Did it go off in my pocket? Did I get caught with it, or what? No is the answer. Did I get rid of it in the nearest trash barrel? And throw away a valuable piece of Shamrock hardware? And be a traitor to Boxer that trusted me? No, señor, I lived through two periods with it burning up my pocket and even carried it home, which won me merit badges with the Jesters even if it costed me two years' growth.

So anyway, I ate breakfast in the dark and went out back. The yard looked very different and misterioso at that time of day. A crouching leopard chilled my blood, which turned into an up-ended washtub. The moon hung low over City Hall. My neighbors were all asleep and I was temporary King of Shamrock Street, till I heard my father talking with

the chickens. He was always the early bird of the family and preached for us to do the same but when he spotted me in the moonlight he seemed quite cranky that anybody should trespass on his private time of day.
"Qué milagro!";oc
he growled and went in the toledo.
5
Shamrock mostly walks to school by Broadway to show our face to the public and because the chicks go that way too, for window-shopping, but today I went by the S.P. tracks which was the shortest road and safest from the Sierra. A steady little breeze blew on my back to help me on my way, which was a hopeful sign. The rails by now were turning pink, night was behind my back and day in front of me and my feet wanted to run. The railroad ties were spaced just right to land on every third one and I ran and ran as if I could run forever, and jumped up in the air and happy little yells and screeches came out of my mouth. Lucky for me, nobody was around to hear. Possibly my father was right, this was the best time of day after all and all my life I had been missing out on it.
It was 6:30 when I got to Audubon. The gates were still locked but I got in through Administration where the custodian was mopping halls. Out back the picnic tables were new-washed and the ground too. The place looked naked, not a single candy paper or Dixie Cup in sight. I dropped a crumpled page out of my notebook to dress it up, then sat down and waited for my tutor.
Who could quite possibly turn out to be some chick. They got better grades than the guys. It might even be some Paddy 9th-grader with blue eyes and stately shape, why not? which would be a new learning experience for me and may be just what I needed to straighten me out. Besides, they claim blondies often get quite interested in dark-skin Latins like myself, though I never quite saw it happen at Audubon Junior High. Whatever, I couldn't afford to show myself a dummy so I opened up my English assignment which slipped my mind last night.
Our text was supposed to be about a certain Mexican kid named Pancho which his father worked for the railroad and his sister María cleaned house for rich old ladies. The story started out in New Mexico where this Pancho specialized mostly in killing rattlesnakes under the baby's crib. They seemed to follow the guy around like a dog, but now Santa Fe has moved the family to Elmsville, Kansas. It's Pancho's first day in his new school but the blondie kids discriminate him and won't let him play on their ball teams so there he is, sitting on the bench. Except Miss Brewster proves very understanding the way teachers are in books and in the ninth inning with bases loaded she gets the bright idea to send him in to pitch. That's where our assignment began so I started reading:
As Pancho advanced to the "mound," a howl of disapproval arose from his teammates. "Who ever heard of a Mexican pitcher?" the shortstop grumbled. "I quit." "He doesn't even have a baseball mitt," exclaimed the catcher. "Then someone can lend him his," Miss Brewster retorted. "Thank you, Miss Brewster," said Pancho, "I'd rather do without."
Billy Jasper stepped into the batter's "box." He was the best hitter on his team. Pancho hurled his pitch. Billy swung his famous home run swing. But lo and behold, the ball twisted around his bat like a corkscrew.

“Steerike one!” roared Miss Brewster in tones a Big League umpire well might envy. New hope came to Pancho’s teammates.
“Oh boy,” cried one of them. “Did you see that ‘sinker’?”
Pancho pitched again. A sharp crack like a pistol shot was heard. It would be a “three-bagger” at least. But Pancho leaped high in the air and caught the ball bare-handed. He then ran nimbly to third base. It was a double play unassisted. The game was over.
“Three cheers for Pancho,” his teammates cried. Pancho’s “strangeness” was now just a memory. Miss Brewster beamed. “This should be a lesson to us all,” she remarked. But Pancho had no time to enjoy his triumph. He had promised his sister María to help her clean house for rich Mrs. Murdock.
The sturdy lad ran all the way up Maple Street and down Persimmon Place and into the banker’s spacious driveway. Scarcely noticing the presence of Sheriff Trotter’s car parked before the towering white columns, he hurried to the kitchen door. Little did he suspect the painful situation into which he was about to stumble.
That ended our chapter and I wasn’t sorry. Like always, they then asked ten questions. Number 1 was, “Can you find a good example of foreshadowing in the pages you have just read?” I went looking for one but before I could find it, here comes my tutor. It was no blondie chick, to my disgust, but only Eddie Velasquez from Milflores Street. Eddie was no friend of mine, but in one way you had to give him credit. He was a big success at Audubon, president of this, secretary of that and a straight-A student with horn-rim specs to prove it, but not even Eddie could find any of that foreshadowing my book told me to look out for.
10
“Tell you what, Rudy,” he said. “Get up there in class and ask your teacher what the question means.”
“Ask her shit,” I said.
“Hold it right there, guy.” Eddie waved his finger back and forth in front of my eyes. “How dumb can you get? Ask a question and there’s a question you won’t have to answer. And teachers love it, Bontempo especially.”
We all know the type that asks that kind of question, but why start an argument? So I sat on the bench and Eddie stood with one foot on it and told me the Secrets of Success at School. First, look neat and well-combed and always sit up straight and don’t stare out the window. Have pencil and paper on you so you don’t have to borrow. Put your hand up every chance you get and give your teacher a pleasant smile when convenient.
“Attitude,” Eddie instructed me, “cooperation, guy, that’s what gets you grades in English and Social Studies and all those bullshit courses. So let’s look at your next question.”
15
“What important lesson does this chapter teach us?” it asked.
“Learn to catch barehanded,” I suggested.
“Wrong,” he told me frankly. “They expect something way bigger, like Attitude to Life.” Eddie studied the air.
“Here you go,” he said. “That chapter teaches us you can’t keep a good man down irregardless of his race, how’s that? So don’t holler if they discriminate you, just be patient and your time will come. Can you remember that? Okay, tell it to Bontempo and there’s an A for you every time.”

I could remember, but how could I recite it with Pelón in the classroom?
"I know a lot of you guys call me a kiss-up," Eddie went on, "but give me ten years, then come up to my office and we'll see who's kissing whose! CPA, Rudy, Certified Public Accountant, that's where I'm heading. And how'm I going to get up there? Grades, buddy, grades. And school activities don't hurt you any when they're passing out those college scholarships. Like for instance, I'm making service points for tutoring you right now."
"Thanks anyway," I said.
"Take one tip from me," he said. "Cut loose from the Jesters. You'll never get nowhere with them guys, except dead or jailed."
I hated to admit it but it made you think. Shamrock had more than its share of early corpses and half our Veteranos ended up in the wrong class of college. Like old San Quentin U. On the other side, there was Eddie. The teachers loved him and right now he was running for Student Body president and had a good chance of winning, it was said, and some blondie chick would be his secretary.
The chainlink gates were open now. The yard was filling up with voters.
"Figure out those other questions on your own," Eddie told me. "I got to go associate. And hey, since I'm doing you a favor, do me one. Line up the Shamrock vote for me, I could do you guys a lot of favors if I get elected. See you tomorrow, Rudy, same place, same time."
And away went Eddie Velasquez, not walking cool and casual like us, more on the order of a diesel locomotive pounding down the track, one Mexican who was going places and I only wondered if I could go that road too. Yesterday I had done my bit for Shamrock. Today I would do it for me, myself and I, and Miss Bontempo's English class was my testing ground.
I'd hoped to be the first student there, to prove my Attitude but of course two Oriental guys were in their seats ahead of me. Possibly they spent the night in there. Miss Bontempo was at the blackboard writing down our Words-We-Live-With. Today they were solid ITES and IGHTS such as right and write, sight, night and kite. She omitted fight, I noticed, and was in a big hurry to finish her list before the class showed up. She never cared to turn her back on us for fear things might go flying.
Miss Bontempo was Italian and around twenty-six years old or twenty-four and not too bad-looking when she smiled. The only trouble was, her smile stayed glued on there too long. It got to looking more like a scream. She was fresh out of teacher college and how that lady had changed since the first day of school. She started out preaching Democracy in the Classroom and Everybody Express Yourself, which was a big change for Audubon after all those Don't-drop-a-pin-or-else teachers we were accustomed to. Then one day somebody stole $11 from Miss Bontempo's purse during Nutrition and a couple of windows got broken by mistake. She still talked Democratic ways but as soon as the discussion got interesting she suddenly turned cop on you.
So anyway, I sat down very studious to copy out my word list and when I caught Bontempo's eye, I flashed her a grade-A smile. It gave her such a scare she dropped the chalk. When the tardy bell rang, the usual stampede came through the door. Books

banged down on desks. A guy from Sierra yanked all the windows open. A Shamrock banged them shut. Then came the usual parade of pencil and paper borrowers till finally something more or less like quiet settled in.
"Good morning, people," Miss Bontempo started off. "And how many of you bothered to read today's assignment?"
Half the hands went up, my own included, though I could see Miss Bontempo serious doubted me.
"Very good. Excellent. Now tell me, class, is reading just some old-fashioned subject we teachers assign to make your lives miserable?" I heard some yesses but my teacher didn't. "Why is it we really need to read well and easily? Can I see hands?"
A few went up, not mine. I hate that kind of question but all the Oriental hands were flying.
35
"We read so we can get to college and make money."
"Very good, Wah, excellent. Are there any other reasons? Yes, Gloria?"
"How could we buy stuff at the store if we can't read the cans?"
"Like street signs too, man, not to get lost."
"My grandma can read Spanish even!"
40
"That's very nice, Linda," Miss Bontempo said, "and I only wish I could too. Those are all good answers. Excellent, but we read for pleasure too, do we not?"
Nobody passed any comments.
"A good book can whisk us off to India or deep into past ages, can it not? Reading takes us out of our little lives and opens whole worlds for us to roam in. Then too, there is another kind of book which gives us insights into our own daily problems and helps us solve them. Our text for instance. Young Pancho and his sister María, are they so very different from the boys and girls seated in this room?"
Slapsy Annie of the Sierra spoke up. "María's working and I wish I was!"
"What I mean is," Miss Bontempo said, "they're both Mexican-American young people like so many of us here. We can identify with them, can we not? And learn from their experience. For instance, from Pancho we can see how patience is rewarded when he proves himself. Isn't that the best way for us to deal with Discrimination? And far better than just sulking or shouting our heads off?"
45
She had just killed Eddie's fine speech which I was all primed with. I had to work fast and up went my hand.
"Yes, Rudy?" Miss Bontempo sighed.
"I don't get that first question," I told her. "What's all this 'foreshadowing' they ask you for?"
"Why, that's a very good question, Rudy. Excellent."
Pelón gave the back of his hand a fat juicy kiss. My face burned.
50
"I was hoping someone would ask that question," Miss Bontempo said. "This is the first time we've met that useful word. Foreshadowing, can anyone tell me what it means? Class?"

Wah said it meant like sunset when it throws your shadow in front of you like walking up Broadway.
"Almost," Miss Bontempo agreed. "But here it means that our author is giving us a little hint that something very exciting is about to happen. He FORESHADOWS it. Open your texts to page forty-seven. Do you see the line, 'Little did Pancho suspect . . .'? That's how our author leads us on into the next chapter."
"He don't lead me on," Pelón said. "He turns me off, man."
"Yes, Richard," which was Pelón's other name. "We all know how hard you are to please."
55
"Oh, indubitably."
"You see," Miss Bontempo went on, "the writer is telling us to expect trouble ahead, though none of us can guess just what it will be."
My hand was up. I was following Eddie to the letter.
"I could guess," I proudly said.
Possibly it was the wrong thing to say because I was told to stand up and give the whole class the benefit of my wisdom.
60
"Well, that rich old lady, I bet she's lost her diamond bracelet so of course she claims María stole it and calls the cops on her."
Miss Bontempo's smile left her for far-off places.
"Rudy, I'm afraid you read the next chapter." I denied it. "Rudy," she sang my name, "you're not being very honest with us, and you're spoiling the story. Nobody could possibly guess that from the text."
I got quite hot. "Then how come the sheriff's car is in the driveway, huh?" I asked. "And how come in that other chapter Mrs. Murdock bragged about her bracelet unless somebody's gonna steal it? Anybody can guess what happens in these dumb books, where on the television—"
"You may be seated, Rudy."
65
Pelón was happy to take over. "Chato's right," he hollered. "And you know something else? Sturdy old Pancho goes and finds that bracelet right where the old lady lost it. In the toledo."
A big scream went up from the girls.
"In the what?" Miss Bontempo was stupid enough to ask.
"The toledo, Oheedo," said Pelón.
"Eeee, send him to the Vice, Miss, he's talking dirty about the restroom," Slapsy Annie screamed.
70
"Shut your big mouth," Boxer suggested.
Various others had other suggestions.
"Quiet! Class, settle down! I won't stand for this!"
"Look at Pelón, Miss," Annie yelled. "He just called me THAT WORD!"
"I did not."
75
"He made it with his lips. I seen him."

“Your mother!”
“La tuya!”;oc

Annie was off in Spanish. Pelón said several things in both languages. The Sierra backed up Annie. We backed our buddy. A pencil flew. Somebody tossed a book. Miss Bontempo hammered on her desk to establish some kind of Law and Order.
“He found it in the toledo,” Pelón repeated, “tucked away in a big old raggedy—”
Scream scream went the girls.
“—roll of toledo paper.”
“Out!” said Miss Bontempo.
“Who? Me?” Pelón asked innocently. “Out where?”
“How come?” I asked. “He was only guessing.”
“You too. Out!”
“You’re discriminating, lady,” Pelón told her. “I’m gonna phone the Mexican consul on you.”
“Vice-principal!” was Miss Bontempo’s answer.
She scratched angry words on pink slips and dealt them out to us. The trip was nothing new for Pelón, but believe it or not, this was my first time.
“You really set that Bontempo up,” Pelón told me in the hall. “Little brother, you done it perfect.”
I felt quite proud of myself but as we passed by Mr. Pilger’s office it bothered me the way my new leaf had withered.
“Mr. Beaver is busy,” the Vice’s secretary informed us. “Wait in the hall.”
The happy sound of the paddle could be heard. We waited on the mourner’s bench.
“He’ll give you a choice,” Pelón advised me. “Either the paddle or else he’ll send home a note. Take the swats. Beaver has a heavy hand but your father’s hand is heavier.”
Pelón popped one of his uncle Ruben’s famous pills.
“Care for one?” he asked.
“Why not?”
“Did you hear the news?” he asked me. “We’re gonna have it out with Sierra after school. Fat Manuel’s gonna meet us across the bridge. He’ll have the arsenal in the back of his car. Are we gonna slaughter them? Oh, indubitably.”
Pelón’s pill hopped around in my stomach like a frog. I coughed and almost threw it up.
“What’s with you, guy?” Pelón inquired. “Did you swallow wrong?”

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1. From the first seven paragraphs alone, what’s your impression of Rudy? Do you like him? Why or why not? Do you know anyone like him? Are you in any way like him? Explain.
2.

Explain your reaction to the reading that Rudy was asked to do for school. Based on your own experience, how typical do you think this type of reading is?
3.
Are you, like Rudy, turned off by the "typical" questions at the end of reading passages, questions that have to do with literary analysis, like foreshadowing? If so, write one good question for the reading that might intrigue Rudy.
4.
What do you think of Eddy's advice to Rudy? What specific advice do you agree with? Disagree with? If Eddy does succeed, will it be because he is book smart or street smart? Explain.
5.
Go back to the text and point to the exact place where Miss Bontempo loses the connection with her students. From this point on, what is revealed about the teacher? What do you learn about the students?
6.
In one sentence, write the message that dwells beneath this short story.
Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing
1.
Arrange to borrow a reader from your local junior high. Analyze the readings in terms of cultural awareness and generalizations; come to some conclusions as to how this text might benefit or hinder students.
2.
Choose one of your favorite books and write an essay in which you convince members of your class that they should read this book.
3.
With two or three other classmates, rewrite this piece, starting at paragraph 31, with this aim in mind: Miss Bontempo enters the classroom and successfully reaches her students with this lesson!

CHERYL SAVAGEAU
First Grade—Standing in the Hall
The poetry of Cheryl Savageau (born in 1950) is rooted in her Native American and French Canadian ancestry. Her first collection, Home Country *(1992), is divided into two parts; the first, "The Dirt Road Home," which has won the Pulitzer Prize, views family life primarily from a child's perspective, and the second, "The Water Flowing through Me," focuses on nature from an adult perspective. A critic in the* Boston Review *described her poems as "portraits of a real working family living out troubled lives in a racially and economically troubled society" (Sam Cornish).*
Suggestions for Prereading or Journal Writing

1.
Think back on your earliest reading experiences. How and when did you learn to read, and who got you interested in reading in the first place?
2.
Write about your earliest grade school memory. Include as many details as you can about that memory.

—for my brother, Ed Savageau

Because he can’t read
the teacher makes him stand
in the hall. He can sing
all his letters, knows
what they look like. He knows

that out of books come stories,
like the ones his Gramma told him.
Now she is in the hospital.
He wonders if she is sleeping,
when she will come home.

The letters do not
talk to him.
They keep their stories
to themselves.
He is hopeless, he is stupid,

he is standing in the hall.
He is waiting in the hall
for the principal
to see him, for the bell to ring,
for the teacher

to call him back inside.
After a while
when no one comes
he stops crying.
A spider is webbing

the pie-shaped window pane
and outside,
the sun is making fire
in the yellow leaves.
If he listens closely

a song will begin in him
that the teachers
can’t silence.

Suggestions for Writing and Discussion

1.
What reasons can you offer for why the student and teacher in this poem are not named or described in detail?

2.
Respond to the first sentence of the poem. What is the author implying in these twelve simple words?
3.
Comment on how the tone and the word choices are appropriate to the theme and topic of this piece.
4.
Where do you find the most beautiful images in this poem? What conclusions can you draw about the student's level of intelligence from these images?
5.
What does this poem say about students, about teachers, and perhaps about education in general? Do you agree with this message? Explain.

Suggestions for Extended Thinking and Writing

1.
Go back to either one of your prereading responses and write your own poem about either your first reading experience or your experience in grade school. As an added challenge, choose words that are either one or two syllables.
2.
Share Savageau's poem with three other people. Ask them to read it over several times and then respond to it. What do they react to in this poem? How does it affect them? Record all their responses and then write an essay that analyzes the effect that this poem has on those readers, including yourself.

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TOPICS FOR MAKING CONNECTIONS:
WAYS OF LEARNING

1.Use at least four sources from this chapter and, in addition, consider your own educational experiences as you plan and write an essay on this question: What are the most important factors to consider when planning a child's education?
2.Write an essay proposing a utopian grade school. Base your description on your personal educational philosophies and experiences; in addition, refer to the selections in this chapter.
3.Referring to at least four selections, define what it means to be an educated person.
4.Write an essay exploring two alternatives to public schooling: private schools and home schooling. Refer to selections in this chapter, and do additional research as you plan and write this paper.
5.Compare and contrast the learning experiences of at least three people whose stories appear in this chapter. Come to some conclusions about why and how these individuals learn or fail to learn.
6.
Write a one-act play in which any three or four students from this chapter are thrown together quite by chance. What conflicts do they encounter? What do they learn from one another? What conclusions does each of them draw about the success of her or his education thus far? What would the students change if they had been in charge of their educations?
7.

Who is ultimately responsible for a child's education? The parents? The schools? Individual teachers? The community? The child? Referring to at least four of the selections in this chapter, write an essay exploring the responsibilities of all these parties. As a conclusion, discuss who you believe is most responsible.

8.

Compare the approaches of four different teachers (not necessarily from school settings) described in this chapter. Use these teachers as examples to develop your definition of the ideal teacher.

_____

Qué milagro!: What a miracle!

_____

La tuya!: Yours!

savageau poem

_____

[1]Sections III, IV, and V are omitted.

One of these pictures shows learning within a classroom setting, while the other depicts a less formal setting for learning. What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of each of these learning situations?