PART ONE

RESPONDING TO READING

Part One presents various ways to respond to reading, with the aim of helping students develop strategies for reading critically.

Chapter 1

Strategies for Reading Critically

Chapter 1 focuses on developing effective reading strategies. The guidelines suggest ways for students to make predictions about a reading's content, foster their reading fluency, distinguish between the author's ideas and experiences and their own reactions to those ideas and experiences, and take a critical stance toward the text. Students can apply the chapter's guidelines to the three readings that are included in the chapter. Many of the strategies are based on the understanding that reading is neither a matter of understanding every word nor a simple process of locating a specific idea that resides in a text as a fixed concept. The act of reading shares with the act of writing an active engagement through which meaning is constructed. Both processes are characterized by the interaction of multiple factors, including the text itself and the reader's prior knowledge. When students bring their own perspectives to bear on the issues raised in the reading, they are able to enter the text, examine their preconceptions critically, and participate in the ongoing intellectual discussion about the subject matter.

GUIDELINES

The guidelines in this chapter introduce students to seven reading strategies: generating background knowledge, using clues to guess at meaning, annotating, clustering ideas, making double-entry notes, taking notes, and writing a journal entry on the reading. Many of these strategies involve writing because reading and writing contribute to each other in significant ways. Writing ability is strengthened through extensive reading for genuine interest or need, and reading ability is enhanced by writing activities that focus on exploring and generating meaning. When students learn to approach reading and writing as interactive ways to learn and to generate their own ideas, they are more likely to become better readers and writers.

Chapter Assignment (page 4)

The chapter assignment asks students to practice a variety of strategies designed to lead them to read critically. As students apply the chapter's guidelines to one

or more of the reading selections in the chapter, they can share their reactions and ideas with a partner, in a small group, or with the whole class.

Depending on the group of students and the level of chaos vis-à-vis course registration, I try to spend a significant part of the first class or two getting started on the work of the course. As a way to help students generate background knowledge (page 4) on the reading they are about to do, I ask them to write for 10 minutes or so on the subject "What True Education Should Do." Then we discuss the various philosophies of education that emerge from the student writing. Next I read aloud Sydney J. Harris's essay, "What True Education Should Do" (page 5). I ask students to work in pairs to use clues to guess at the meaning of an unfamiliar word (page 6). Then I ask them to use one or more strategies for responding to the reading: annotating (page 7), clustering ideas (page 8), making double-entry notes (page 9), or taking notes (page 10). Additionally or alternatively, I ask them to make a journal entry on the reading (page 11).

During this time, I move around the room, stopping to answer questions and make suggestions. For example, I remind some students not to write long summaries when they make double-entry notes. If individual students seem to have writer's block when it comes to the journal entry, I briefly discuss with them their reactions to the reading and encourage them to record those reactions without focusing on the mechanics of writing.

I then ask students to share their reactions to the reading. I prefer to have students talk about what they wrote rather than read exactly what they wrote. I try to have every student make a contribution, which means that I limit my own talking. When things go well, I can walk around the room nodding to students to indicate their turn and let the students' voices dominate the class. After a few or all of the students have spoken, I encourage them to interact with one another, for example, by pointing out that they have different interpretations of the reading and asking them to discuss why that is so.

For the next class, I assign another brief reading selection, for example, "Barriers" (pages 13–15) or "Waiting in Line at the Drugstore" (pages 16–19), along with the Write After You Read activity that follows the reading. When students come to the next class, they take turns sharing what they have written. If there are new students, I ask for a student volunteer to summarize the reading so that the new students can feel included in the class and can follow and contribute to the subsequent discussion.

READINGS

In addition to the argumentative essay, "What True Education Should Do" by Sydney J. Harris, Chapter 1 includes two essays based on the writers' experiences: "Barriers" by Rolando Niella and "Waiting in Line at the Drugstore" by James Thomas Jackson. Together, these readings set the stage for several of the major

themes that emerge in the readings in Part Two of *Guidelines*: learning, language, communication, literacy, and migration.

Reading 1 (pages 13–15)

Barriers *Rolando Niella*

In this essay, written in his first year of college, Rolando Niella compares the experience of learning a second language to the experience of learning how to play tennis. He reveals the frustration and discouragement that occurs when he cannot sustain a conversation or keep a ball in play. Yet he concludes that practice will result in mastery and that the effort is worthwhile.

For this student essay, I use discussion activities that are similar to those used for the professional essays. This method gives students a sense of a student writer as a *writer* and helps them recognize that what they themselves write will become reading for someone else. "Barriers" is not presented as a perfect model. Any discussion of how Rolando Niella could have strengthened the essay is worthwhile.

Reading 2 (pages 16–19)

Waiting in Line at the Drugstore *James Thomas Jackson*

James Thomas Jackson describes how he became a writer after dropping out of school at age 13. Sent by his employer to buy food and supplies, he is forced to wait in line at a drugstore until white people are served first. While waiting, he reads book after book from a bookcase in the store and becomes aware not only of white American writers but also of African-American writers whose existence had been ignored in his schooling.

Two points students may debate in this essay are why Jackson's wait time eventually becomes shorter and why the waitresses come to treat him with "a sense of graciousness" (page 18). Another question worth discussing is the influence of African-American writers on Jackson's own writing career. Would his life have had the same outcome if he had read only non-African-American writers?

I supplement the reading with photographs and documents of the period, such as those in *A Pictorial History of African Americans: Newly Updated Edition* by Langston Hughes et al. (Crown, 2005).

Further Reading:

Acosta, June, ed. *Waiting in Line at the Drugstore and Other Writings of James Thomas Jackson*. Denton, Texas: U of North Texas P, 1993.

Kennedy, Stetson. *Jim Crow Guide: The Way It Was*. Boca Raton: Florida Atlantic UP, 1990.

PART TWO

READINGS AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS

Part Two includes four chapters of readings and accompanying essay assignments that, together, ask students to write from experience, relate what they read to what they have experienced, analyze an argumentative essay, and analyze a work of fiction. I believe that an essay assignment is most meaningful if it is viewed as a stage in a sequence of tasks so that students know they have multiple opportunities to build on their own learning and thinking. Accordingly, the guidelines that follow each assignment take students through various stages of developing an essay. As students develop their essays, of course, they may find that the stages interact or overlap, and they may add new stages to the process.

While the assignment in Chapter 2 instructs students to write from their own experiences, the assignments in Chapters 3 through 5 instruct students to write about the course readings. These assignments allow students to frame their own questions about the assigned readings. This helps students create a bridge between achieving a satisfactory comprehension and interrogation of another author's ideas and creating an analytical argument of their own. Ideally, through writing, students will gain insight into why authors have shaped their writing in particular ways or will discover previously unnoticed connections between ideas or issues.

Chapter 2

Writing from Experience

Most students can write from sources more easily if they first gain confidence using written language to write from their own experience or background knowledge. This chapter does not focus only on students' own experiences and background knowledge, however. Students are asked to respond to what they read, for example, by writing journal entries or by answering the discussion questions that follow the reading, and can thereby strengthen the critical reading strategies they practiced in Chapter 1.

READINGS

The reading selections in Chapter 2 are based on the writers' experiences with living in multiple worlds. Given the students' familiarity with the subject matter, these readings have produced powerful reactions from students in my own writing classes and have motivated students to write. The readings have the added benefit of providing significant cultural or historical material for us to discuss. I myself enjoy reading these selections again and again, so I find it a pleasure to present them to students. Two of these selections can be categorized as works

of fiction. Anzia Yezierska's piece is taken from a novel, and Zitkala-Ša's piece is fictionalized autobiography.

Reading 1 (pages 24–30)

The School Days of an Indian Girl *Zitkala-Ša*

In this selection, Zitkala-Ša describes the experience of a Native-American child who voluntarily left her reservation at the age of eight to attend an English-only mission school for Native Americans. Unable to speak or understand English and treated rudely, she is frightened and lonely. Within a year, with her English strengthened, she rebels by deliberately misinterpreting an instruction and mashing hated turnips through the bottom of a jar.

The writing may at first appear to be an innocent retelling of a difficult adjustment to school. But a close rereading may reveal that underlying Zitkala-Ša's words are criticism and mockery of European Americans, in particular of the missionaries in the boarding school. Countering the prevailing stereotype that Native Americans are savages, whereas European Americans are civilized, for example, she describes the uncivilized behavior of white women, who use physical violence to discipline children, in contrast to her mother's method of reasoning quietly. Students may debate whether the child's rebellion is a positive or negative outcome of her experience.

I supplement this reading with photographs, such as those from Rayna Green's *Women in American Indian Society* (Chelsea, 1992).

Further Reading:

Spack, Ruth. "Transforming Women: Zitkala-Ša's *American Indian Stories*," in Ruth Spack, *America's Second Tongue: American Indian Education and the Ownership of English, 1860–1900*. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2002. pp. 142–170.

Susag, Dorothea M. "Zitkala-Ša (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin): A Power(full) Literary Voice." *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 5 (Winter 1993): 3–24.

Reading 2 (pages 30–35)

My English *Julia Alvarez*

In this essay, Julia Alvarez describes how English went from being the language that kept her parents' secrets to the language that opened her up to new ways of self-expression. She explains how she acquired the language and internalized it only after moving from the Dominican Republic to the United States, where her ongoing experience with English led her to relax enough to develop a felt sense of the language and its meanings. Her experience was enhanced by the affirmative pedagogical strategies of her sixth-grade English teacher. Alvarez's story demonstrates how practice, immersion, creativity, encouragement, and support can enable second language learning.

Alvarez's experience in the Dominican Republic strikes many students as unique, for her parents sent her to an English-only school rather than to a bilingual school or to a school whose medium of instruction was Spanish. Nevertheless,

they identify with her struggle to learn the new language and with her growing understanding of different ways to use language, including Spanglish. The students in my classes have had fruitful discussions about how Alvarez's sixth-grade teacher instilled a love of writing in her. This classroom scene reappears in *Guidelines* in Activity: Synthesizing two sources (pages 256–258), where students are asked to compare it to a classroom scene from Esmeralda Santiago's *When I Was Puerto Rican*. In the Santiago piece, the English teacher's assignment discourages the student's impulse to write.

Further Reading:

Alvarez, Julia. *Something to Declare: Essays*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books, 1998.
Silvio, Sirias. *Julia Alvarez: A Critical Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2001.

Reading 3 (pages 35–41)

College *Anzia Yezierska*

In this excerpt from an autobiographical novel, Anzia Yezierska conveys the disappointment of a poverty-stricken immigrant who finds that college life is not what she had hoped for. Impressed by the beauty of the campus and of the students, the narrator wants to become an integral part of this scene. Overworked, rejected, and humiliated by her isolation, she ultimately finds strength in the realization that her suffering pales in comparison to the pain that others have experienced.

Students may identify strongly with the narrator ("This story is so true!") or they may find her too rude or too self-pitying ("I understand that she was poor and wanted her life to change but nothing can change overnight, and she's got to learn to live with that."). They may find the writing powerful ("the sense of loss of the author was digging into the reader's heart"), or they may consider it melodramatic.

I supplement this reading with photographs of the Lower East Side in New York City at the turn of the twentieth century. Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Scribner's, 1890) is a good resource. It can be found online at www.cis.yale.edu/amstud/inforev/riis/title.html.

Further Reading:

Harris, Alice Kessler. Introduction. *Bread Givers*. By Anzia Yezierska. New York: Doubleday, 1975. v–xviii.
Henriksen, Louise Levitas. *Anzia Yezierska: A Writer's Life*. New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1988.

Reading 4 (pages 42–46)

A Book-Writing Venture *Kim Yong Ik*

Kim Yong Ik writes of how he decided to become a writer in English during the time he was a college student in the United States, even though he struggled with the language. He explains how the differences between English and his first language, Korean, created stumbling blocks along the way, how he read

literature in English as he consistently worked on his craft, and how he ultimately succeeded in publishing his work. His story demonstrates not only the importance of practice, persistence, and belief in one's self but also the significant role that reading can play in developing writing ability.

This inspirational story rarely fails to impress students with their own potential and possibilities in the English language. It also creates a lot of discussion about the difficulty of translation, given the differences between languages and cultures, with students providing examples from their respective backgrounds.

Further Reading:

Cheung, King-Kok. *An Interethnic Companion to Asian American Literature*. NY: Cambridge UP, 1996.
Kim, Yong Ik. *The Happy Days*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1960.

Reading 5 (pages 46–51)

Mother Tongue *Amy Tan*

Amy Tan explains how she uses different versions of English for different occasions, for example, a standard English that she learned at school and a family English that she uses with her mother, whose first language is Chinese. Tan says that, although her mother's reading ability is sophisticated, her spoken language is often characterized by others as deficient. Nevertheless, Tan sees strength in its images, creativity, and rhythm. Tan indicates that her own language development was shaped by her familial experience, causing her teachers to try to steer her away from writing to more quantitative studies, but her rebellious nature pushed her to pursue her interests. She found success as a writer when she envisioned her mother as the reader of her stories and embraced all of the Englishes she knew.

Students respond well to this essay, and my classes have had many rich discussions about the varieties of languages they know and how language has shaped their own identities and career paths. One of the most poignant responses I have read in a journal entry came from a student who gained a new appreciation of her own mother's spoken language after reading "Mother Tongue":

> *Amy Tan's passage hit very close to home. The experiences she shared with her mother and the English her mother speaks are similar in nature to some of the experiences my mother and I have shared. . . . [T]he English my mother speaks sometimes does embarrass me and even nowadays I still wish that she was able to speak what I deem to be "proper" English. However, in reading this article I have realized that it is true that who is to say what is "proper" English. I can understand the English my mother speaks perfectly and she understands the English I speak. So who is to say that we are not able to communicate as effectively as anyone else?*

Further Reading:

Huntley, E. D. *Amy Tan: A Critical Companion*. Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1998.
Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Amy Tan: A Literary Companion*. Jefferson, N.C: McFarland, 2004.

GUIDELINES

In this section of Chapter 2, students are able to see the process undertaken by a student named Rolando Niella as he applied the recommended guidelines to produce his own essay, "Barriers," which appears in Chapter 1 on pages 13–15. This is an eye-opener for many students. Earlier journal entries, written just after they had read the completed essay, reveal some students' insecurity about writing: "I wish my pepers will be as good as the 'Barriers' but I don't think they will be. I can't think of a topic orginal enough and within my knowledge." As they later watch the unfolding of his essay, however, their reactions change: "I was very impressed by the way his essay improved. I could tell that he put a lot of time and effort to the essay. Now I understand that I can do it too."

Although I mention in class several times that Rolando's writing was corrected for publication, many students believe he was able to write without making errors. To disabuse them of this idea, I show students this sample of his actual writing (which was originally a handwritten mess!):

> *Are they bodered by my language problem, can't they carrie on coversation with me because they always talk about local or national subject of which I 'not inform. This is really hard and some time make me feel like an estranger in a group were everybody is lauphin and talking and they sopposly were my friends.*

Essay Assignment (page 52)

One of the traps of an essay based on experience can be merely to recount events rather than to find insight or meaning in the experience. I find that when, under my guidance, students have the opportunity to share their experiences in class and ask each other questions for the purpose of uncovering meaning, the resulting essay is more satisfactory.

Note: Although I typically begin my course with the readings in this chapter, I don't necessarily use them to lead to an essay that focuses on writing from experience. I sometimes assign the essay assignment in Chapter 3, Relating Reading to Experience. If I have a particularly advanced group of students, I might assign students to synthesize the readings to develop generalizations or theories about such themes as living in multiple worlds or communicating across languages and cultures. Or I might ask them to read LaRay M. Barna's "Intercultural Communication Stumbling Blocks" in Chapter 3 (pages 66–74) and apply it to one or more of the readings in Chapter 2. For any of these assignments, I find the *Guidelines for Synthesizing* in A Handbook for Writing to be useful (page 255).

Exploring a Topic (pages 52–61)

In class, students practice several brainstorming strategies to get started on and develop ideas for an essay. I spread these writing activities out over time. Teaching these strategies can be fun, but the techniques don't work for everyone. Some students may find them useless at first but then, with more practice, use them

successfully. As long as I present them as strategies and not as rules that must be followed, the techniques can enhance the classroom experience. I usually write along with students and we share what we have written.

Making a List (pages 52–53)

Students can work alone or in groups to generate lists. Some of the topics they come up with may sound outrageous, but I encourage them to take risks to enliven the assignment. This activity can be completed in 10 minutes or less.

Freewriting (pages 53–54)

I usually give students approximately 10 minutes to write individually, with instructions to keep the pen moving and to write "I have nothing to say" over and over until an idea emerges. Most students seem to find this to be a liberating experience, but some may be intimidated at first; so I am always prepared to offer aid to anyone who seems paralyzed by the task by carrying on a private conversation that helps the student to brainstorm ideas.

Looping (pages 54–56)

This activity is an extension of the freewriting exercise, but looping also asks students to reflect on what they have written. I often stop after each loop and ask some students to read aloud what they have written or to read just the summary sentence. I sometimes volunteer to read my own "loop" first to get things going. Sometimes this activity goes quickly; sometimes it takes a long time. If we run out of time, students can finish looping outside of class.

Cubing (pages 57–60)

The secret of successful cubing is to spend only 2–3 minutes on each perspective. The fast pace stimulates the imagination. I often stop after one or two perspectives to see what students have written, to get their reactions, and to encourage them to go on. This activity can take a long time and can be completed out of class. I have sometimes brought to class Tootsie Roll Pops or other objects to encourage students to stretch their imaginations to generate ideas. The lollipop tends to tap into childhood memories, which can lead some students to a topic for the first essay.

Clustering Ideas for Writing (pages 60–61)

Clustering can be an especially effective visual technique. Clustering also appears as a reading strategy in Chapter 1 (page 8) as a way to create a map of the ideas in a reading selection.

Focusing Ideas (page 61)

After they have explored a topic, it is a good idea for students to start thinking about how to make sense of all they have written up to this point. I do not think of focusing as writing a thesis. The term *thesis* may be useful for some students but, in my experience, it is paralyzing for many others, especially at this early stage. When I talk to students about their writing, I often ask, "What do you think you want to focus on?" or "What are you focusing on?" These types of questions seem

to have more real-life qualities than "What is your thesis?" and thus are relatively easy for students to answer informally in a way to help them shape their ideas. Students will be directed back to this guidelines box when they are composing the essay assignments that appear later in the book.

Structuring the Essay (pages 62–63)

To organize essays based on experience, whose structure is determined largely by the writer's subject matter and intention, the best advice, I believe, is simply to have an overall framework: beginning, middle, and ending. My own reading of hundreds of published personal essays suggests that few have a "thesis" in the first paragraph, and so – still avoiding the word *thesis* – I offer make-a-point-at-the-beginning as only one option among others. For some students, the organizational pattern is clear from the outset; they may make mental or written outlines. For others, the pattern does not emerge until after they have written one or more drafts. Often my feedback on drafts relates to revising for a more logical organization. The flow chart on pages 62–63 shows three different possibilities for structuring an essay based on experience.

Writing the Essay (pages 63–64)

This paragraph directs students to consult Section II of A Handbook for Writing, where they can receive guidance in drafting, exchanging feedback, and revising their essays. Included here, too, is a checklist titled *Evaluative Criteria for Writing an Essay from Experience* (page 64), which students can apply to their own drafts, to their classmates' drafts, or to the sample student essay by Rolando Niella, "Barriers" (pages 13–15).

Completing the Essay (page 64)

This paragraph reminds students to proofread, edit, and prepare clear final copies of their essays. It also directs them to the relevant pages in A Handbook for Writing for specific guidance.

Chapter 3

Relating Reading to Experience

Chapter 3 builds on what students have accomplished in Chapter 2. By writing from their own experience, students have practiced exploratory writing and have used details and examples to clarify points. They will now learn how to integrate material from their experiences with material from the reading. Chapter 3 should be used concurrently with A Handbook for Writing, especially to guide students through the processes of citing, summarizing, paraphrasing, and quoting sources.