

English Senior Seminar, Berea College
Spring 2015
DALN keyword: BereaES2015

Literacy Narrative Assignment

"When you write, you lay out a line of words. The line of words is a miner's pick, a woodcarver's gouge, a surgeon's probe. You wield it, and it digs a path you follow. Soon you find yourself deep in new territory. Is it a dead end, or have you located the real subject? You will know tomorrow, or this time next year."

Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life*

Part I, a literacy narrative: As our readings and discussions suggest, many factors influence our learning to value and use written language: family background, school practices, cultural contexts, gender, ethnicity. In this nonfiction writing, you must analyze one or more influences that has shaped -- for good or for bad or for both -- your attitudes, abilities, practices, and/or goals in writing and/or reading and/or oral communication.

Your finished analysis should present one or more conclusions about your development, supported with specific examples and illustrations. In developing your points, you may reference any of our readings. Your finished writing should be satisfyingly focused, persuasively developed, clearly structured, and carefully written.

Your audience is yourself – what you can discover – plus your peers – other literate thoughtful people who are not you. You will post all or part of your finished essay on DALN (instructions will be given).

Your writing may take any form that serves your purpose.

Suggested process: over the next week, do a lot of discovery writing on this topic. Start by considering your reflection essay on your English major. What have you achieved, where do you need to grow? If you like, you can concentrate on your development in college. Or you can broaden, reflecting on various influences, in school and out, through your lifetime. Which of these is most important? In what ways have the influences played out in you? What directions might you take in the future? How is your experience like or unlike those of our authors? Consider too the question on the DALN handout on literacy narratives. You might begin by reading a handful of literacy narratives in DALN. Where do you find resonances or disconnects? Be broad – but don't just skim the surface -- dig in. Think, think, think, and write, write, write.

Length: 750-1500 words.

Part II: analysis of others' literacy narratives: In your literacy narrative, you have focused on some aspect of your development as a reader and/or writer and have examined one or more influences that have shaped -- for good or for bad or for both -- your attitudes, abilities, understandings, practices, and/or goals.

Now you need to dig into the literacy experiences/reflections of TWO or THREE other writers. Your goal is to further your inquiry into your literacies by bringing your insights into conversation with those of some others.

Materials for analysis:

One of your narratives for analysis should come from the DALN. The other one or two may also come from that Archive, or from Alberto Manguel's *A Reader on Reading*; bell hooks' *Remembered Rapture*; Annie Dillard's *A Writing Life*; J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye*; or from a classmate's essay.

You may select narratives that affirm, extend, and/or challenge yours – or do any combination of these. Be sure to look in detail at the writer's experiences, understandings, and conclusions. How are those like or unlike yours? How do those writings help you better understand your own development? If you choose two narratives, you should examine them in more depth.

Form:

Your analysis may be a separate essay, a Part II to your personal literacy inquiry. Write in first person about the narratives you're analyzing and the insights they yield for your inquiry.

Alternatively, you may integrate your analysis/insights into your literacy narrative, creating a new essay in which you examine your experiences intertwined with those of the others you select.

Style:

Write in an accessible, compelling voice. Make this a piece that others will want to read and that does justice to your and others' insights.

Length: Aim for 700-1000 words, whether in a separate essay or integrated into your narrative. You may also choose to expand your narrative to reflect your new insights.

Suggested Process:

Identify key themes and questions that drive your narrative. Find two or three writings that speak to those questions and themes. Do exploratory writing to develop your analysis. Then think about an effective form for this new thinking.

You will post all or part of your finished writings on DALN (instructions will be given).

