

**The School Experience in the Coming of Age Novel:
Jane Eyre and *The Catcher in the Rye***

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INTRODUCTION

Students are troubled by these times in which we live, and it is an essential part of my job to address their troubles, to make the curriculum relevant and interesting, and to safeguard the province of literary art as a meaningful and effective part of public education. By engaging in the study of literary art, we will all be better able to make sense of the world around us. Adolescents are incredibly self-absorbed, and the process of truly reading a book is inherently empathetic. When I taught *The Catcher in the Rye* with my sophomores, the chance to analyze the fictitious character of Holden Caulfield gave my students the opportunity to discuss the antics and anxieties of growing up in a way that a direct approach could not have.

Why study alienation?

Though few would be willing to outright ban such books as *Catcher in the Rye*, many still have the sense that it is somehow subversive, that it encourages rebellion in teenagers. Some teachers prefer to teach books with a “positive” message or theme. The subject of the seminar that produced this unit was “Adolescence and Alienation: Can Books Heal the Wounds?” What we primarily discussed is how books, like Salinger’s allow readers to explore the “negative.” Students, or any age of reader for that matter, who feel alienated by their social milieu can gain something from entering into the perspective of an alienated character. They learn that they are not alone in their struggles; others feel the same way they do (e.g. that everyone around them is a “phony”). As for those of us who do not necessarily feel alienated by our culture, alienistic writing offers a way to shake us up a little -- to become tolerant of and attuned to the feelings of those around us.

Dr. William Monroe of the University of Houston speaks of this as one of the “virtues of alienation” in his book *Power to Hurt*. I used to wrestle as an English teacher with curriculum choices involving “dark” or “disturbing” works of literature. The truth is that I am personally attracted to such works, and I think that they offer wonderful stimuli for discussion and writing; but I would always feel that I “should” offer my students something more uplifting or inspiring. Working through the idea that entering into “negative” experiences empathetically through fiction has lent me assurance and confidence in my curriculum choices.

The school experience as a focus

I am particularly interested in the subject of school itself as it occurs in literature, especially literature of this type. The experience of the institution that is today's American public school is a source of great stress and trauma for those students who feel alienated from either peer groups, family, or teachers. I know that Salinger's novel deals explicitly with the anxieties of Holden's school experience, and I am interested in examining how school or any sort of educational experiences figure into the maturation plots of coming of age novels which are traditionally taught in American high schools. I believe a curriculum unit on the school experience itself, approached through literature, would be a timely and relevant subject for today's students, considering the atmosphere of anxiety that has been created by the recent shootings and resultant security policies.

In addition to *The Catcher in the Rye*, I will have students read Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. If I determine that it is not appropriate to read the entire novel, the first ten chapters covering her childhood should suffice. *Jane Eyre* is a nice companion piece to Salinger because it offers the feminine perspective on growing up, taking the *man* out of *Bildungsroman*. Jane is an orphan who feels terribly alienated by the family that raises her. They send her off to a boarding school to be rid of her, but not before assuring that her reputation there will be poisoned. Her aunt does her best to ensure that those in charge treat Jane as an ill-mannered child.

Nearly as memorable and dear to young readers as Jane herself, is the "singularly agreeable" Miss Temple, every student's ideal refuge against the Brocklehursts and Scatcherds of that compulsory institution called the school. To be accurate, schools such as Lowood in the "hungry 1840's" were neither compulsory nor even available to most. As a supposed orphan, Jane is offered the chance to board there rather than be put out amongst the masses of poor, marking her distinctly as a member of the middle class. Jane's education prepares her for her station in life as a governess, a position of particular interest to the nineteenth century discourse on class. Nevertheless, her feelings of imprisonment and persecution within the walls of Lowood Institution continue to resonate profoundly with students of today's mandatory centers of public education. What does a novel so often taught in schools have to say about school itself? The primary thrust of Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre* is *Bildung*, and her experience of and attitude towards schooling are merely stepping stones in her overall education toward female independence and self-realization. Ultimately she must strike out on her own; for, like many coming of age novels, education is more about experience than classroom instruction.

Likewise, Holden's school experience features prominently in his narrative about growing up. *The Catcher in the Rye* offers an appetizing variety of experiences: peer interactions, disciplinary altercations, mentoring, classroom scenes, and extracurricular activities. Both Holden and Jane feel alienated in their school environment; both find

mentors to an extent; and both ultimately must independently “go out” into the world to achieve epiphany or maturity.

After having my students read both books (*Jane Eyre* could be summer reading), the first task would be to discuss in general terms the driving question behind this unit: what do these books so often read in school have to say about school itself? After an open-ended discussion on this topic, I would move them to a more systematic analysis of various episodes in the novels. The ultimate goal, after analyzing these images, events, and characters will be for the students to write a personal narrative about a significant episode in their own school experiences. For the purposes of this narrative, however, I will partake in some analysis myself before further discussing specific lesson plans and assignments in detail.

JANE’S SCHOOLING

When young Jane is put out of her home at Gateshead and relegated to an institutionalized existence, the elder authorial Jane gives us a detailed account of the overwhelming nature of this important transition in her life. The images are those of hunger and cold and dimness. As Jane enters the world of organized education, the first issue of importance is nourishment. The burnt porridge does not bode well, but quickly introduces the key player in Jane’s school experience, Miss Temple. Defying the staunch regulations of the institution, Miss Temple provides bread and cheese to the girls, just as she will later provide much needed affection and inspiration. One of the important lessons school holds for Jane is the need to channel her appetites toward learning and wisdom, and ultimately the satisfaction of independence.

Oppressive institutions

Before beginning a detailed analysis of Miss Temple as refuge amidst the oppression, however, it is necessary to examine the oppressive institution itself. Mr. Brocklehurst explains clearly that his “plan in bringing up these girls is, not to accustom them to habits of luxury and indulgence, but to render them hardy, patient, self-denying” (125). Brocklehurst’s next move is to berate a girl for her curled hair, whereupon his tirade is interrupted by the visit of his wife and daughters. Jane, the narrator, demonstrates Brocklehurst’s hypocrisy with relish, detailing the elaborate fashion of their attire. Bronte’s rhetoric in this episode is clear: self-denial and modesty are class issues, not spiritual ones. Lowood institution demands a strict regimen of privation in order to train its pupils to accept their position in society, while the upper classes pursue both an education and a life of leisure and comfort.

Class satire

This class satire is one of the most culturally provocative issues in the novel, and the role that school plays in highlighting the issue is an important one. Lowood ultimately prepares Jane to become a governess, a position of particular social anxiety in nineteenth-century Britain. During this period, “as more unmarried middle-class women competed aggressively for the available governess positions, the hardships of teaching intensified, for overcrowding drove wages down and encouraged employers to place ever stricter demands on the women who sought this work” (Poovey 43). Not only were the economic conditions difficult, but the social climate for this unusual class of women became increasingly awkward and trying. When Bessie meets Jane after years of education, she exclaims, “Oh you are quite a lady, Miss Jane!” (158). Jane could conduct herself in a genteel manner, could play piano, paint, and speak French better than the Reed children. According to Poovey, “The governess brought the economic realities of the 1840’s into sharp relief in a form that might undermine the ‘natural’ distinctions that ought to anchor social relations and morality” (45). The status of the governess fell into an uncomfortable middle slot in Britain’s rigid class system. What was a genteel woman like Blanche Ingram supposed to do with an educated, artistic, and potentially sexualized young woman running about the house—one who could not be treated quite like a servant? As Richard Nemesvari argues, “Jane’s presence is a galling reminder not only of a childhood time when Blanche was nominally under the control of lower-status women, but also that, although lacking her wealth and birth, those women, and Jane herself, have ‘accomplishments’ equal to hers” (27). Thus, despite the superficially negative portrayal of school in the novel, the overall message is that formal education provides an avenue for less advantaged girls to rise above certain class limits Victorian society would place upon them. In creating a heroine who not only attains this position by virtue of her learning rather than birthright, but who also marries the master himself in the end, Bronte does more than just evoke Victorian class anxieties. She offers a threatening plan of action for ladder-climbing, independently-minded girls of the middle class.

It is not, however, the rigid patriarchal Lowood model that Bronte promotes. Rather, her portrayal of Miss Temple and Helen Burns seems almost prophetically to anticipate the future of girls’ education. M. Carey Thomas, in founding Bryn Mawr College in 1872 said: “There we would live loving each other and urging each other on to every high and noble deed or action and all who passed should say ‘their example arouses me, their books ennoble me, their ideas inspire me and behold they are women!’” (qtd. in Macpherson 97). Helen and Miss Temple together represent two key facets of the feminist community: the need for companionship and mentors. These necessities are what the Reeds denied Jane, and upon finding them, she declares confidently, “I would not now have exchanged Lowood with all its privations, for Gateshead and its daily luxuries” (139).

Peer Support

Nevertheless, Helen offers much more than simple friendship to young Jane. When Jane gets a chance to share an intimate moment with Helen and Miss Temple together, observing their dialogue, she is filled with wonder in describing Helen's intellectual powers:

They woke, they kindled: first, they glowed in the bright tint of her cheek, which till this hour I had never seen but pale and bloodless; then they shone in the liquid lustre of her eyes, which had suddenly acquired a beauty more singular than that of Miss Temple's -- a beauty neither of fine colour nor long eyelash, nor penciled brow, but of meaning, of movement, of radiance. Then her soul sat on her lips, and language flowed, from what source I cannot tell: has a girl of fourteen a heart large enough, vigorous enough to hold the swelling spring of pure, full, fervid eloquence? Such was the characteristic of Helen's discourse on that, to me memorable evening: her spirit seemed hastening to live within a very brief span as much as many live during a protracted existence. (137)

For a girl as "plain" as Jane, this is an epiphanic moment: she recognizes the beauty of interior intellect as opposed to the outward show of feature, dress, and "colour." Perhaps more importantly, there is in this moment an awakening in Jane of an appreciation of "language" and "eloquence" and "discourse." Jane gets her first artistic impulse after leaving the bliss of this scene; she sketches her first cottage, emblematic of the home she is destined to create for herself. But her true artistic calling is writing. It is Jane Eyre, autobiographer, that we behold in the narrative present throughout the novel, and therefore Brontë's novel can be read as *Künstlerroman* as much as *Bildungsroman*. Jane's ultimate act of selfhood (and the culmination of her education) is to write her own story, the eventual fulfillment of those first longings she feels while listening to the enthralling conversation of Helen and Miss Temple.

A feminist critique

As mesmerizing as these two figures are for most school-age readers of the novel, both Helen and Miss Temple are actually subjects themselves for Feminist critique. Helen Burns and Miss Temple have inculcated in Jane the values of endurance and obedience. It is ironic that Helen's self-effacing Christianity precisely conforms to Brocklehurst's proclamations of the school's objectives for proper girls of this class. Helen is "hardy, patient, and self-denying" when put upon by her teachers, and is therefore the model pupil. Likewise, Miss Temple can be viewed as submissive and repressed at Brocklehurst's side.

The contrast between Jane and Helen is most poignant when Jane explains, ". . . if others don't love me, I would rather die than live -- I cannot bear to be solitary and hated, Helen. Look here; to gain some real affection from you, or Miss Temple, or any other

whom I truly love, I would willingly submit to have the bone of my arm broken . . .” (133). Helen responds reproachfully, “Hush Jane! You think too much of the love of human beings . . .” (133). This is a lesson which the novel’s plot and structure do not support. Jane will ultimately, and heroically, opt for love rather than spiritual duty. It is the very reason she can never marry St. John, who wants her to be more like Helen Burns. An essential step in Jane’s education here is to define her own sense of values, rather than emulating those of her friend and mentor utterly.

There are, however, important and specific lessons she does learn at Lowood. Of primary importance is taming her rage and learning to forgive. After Jane’s diatribe on the importance of justice, “striking back,” and “only doing good to those who are good to you,” Helen declares, “You will change your mind, I hope, when you are older: as yet you are but a little untaught girl” (119). Helen goes on to explain that this is the model that Christ has set forth in the New Testament -- to love one’s enemies. Jane exclaims, “Then I should love Mrs. Reed, which I cannot do” (120). This time, Brontë’s plot upholds the lesson; the scene wherein Jane forgives Mrs. Reed on her deathbed is one of the most celebrated acts of heroism in the novel.

Jane as a teacher

An examination of the portrayal of school in the novel would be incomplete without looking at Jane’s experience as a teacher herself. Her first experience is teaching alongside her mentor at Lowood, an experience about which Jane the narrator is consciously silent. The adult Jane is reduced to litotes in describing those years: they were “not unhappy, because it was not inactive” (149). As a teacher in an institutionalized environment, Jane feels what many teachers today probably still feel: “I had no communication by letter or message with the outer world: school-rules, school-duties, school-habits and notions, and voices, and faces, and phrases, and costumes, and preferences, and antipathies: such was what I knew of existence. And now I felt that it was not enough . . .” (151). Later, as governess (another kind of teaching position), Jane tells us precious little about her employment. Poovey notices this and writes, “Brontë marginalizes the work [of governessing]. Although she depicts several encounters between Jane and her pupil, Adele, Brontë does not describe the instruction that takes place” (44). Jane seems more concerned with the female companionship her position offers than with training Adele up as a young woman.

The final statement the novel makes about being an educator is all too clear in Jane’s employment at the village school. In reference to her vocation amidst England’s needy lower classes, the best Jane can do is hope that “in a few months, it is possible, the happiness of seeing progress, and a change for the better in my scholars, may substitute gratification for disgust” (455). This is one example of a passage which makes the political thrust of the novel clear and specific. *Jane Eyre* is about achieving equality and independence for women of the white British middle class, not for improving the lot of all

women through education. Furthermore, Jane's "duty" at the village school is too closely akin to the duty which St. John would impose on her as a missionary's wife. As a teacher herself, Jane Eyre feels indifference at best, and "disgust" at worst.

Experience: the ultimate guide

In conclusion, *Jane Eyre*'s portrayal of schooling is varied and provocative. Students who identify and sympathize with Jane cannot help but be compelled by the similarly sympathetic Helen Burns and Miss Temple. Ultimately, however, Jane's true education must be one of experience, of "going forth" out of the bounds of the school house, whether it be oppressive or supportive. The degree with which Jane eschews teaching as a career belies the novel's ultimate rejection of the efficacy of schooling. At most, *Jane Eyre* anticipates the future of women's educational institutions in its portrayal of the importance of female companionship and mentoring. Both in the 1840's and today, a girl had better hang on to a sense of self while following the Temples and enduring the Brocklehursts.

HOLDEN'S SCHOOLING

Like Jane, Holden Caulfield also deals with overbearing teachers and inspiring mentors; but Holden's school experience is darker. The first thing to discuss with students is how they read Holden Caulfield. The novel is written in the first person just like *Jane Eyre*, but Salinger does more with this mode than does Bronte. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a post-modern novel and is partially about writing itself. Holden is thus an unreliable narrator to some extent, and it is the students' job to determine just how to perceive the opinions of this alienated teenager. We as teachers can assume to begin with that our students are more likely than adults to be seduced by Holden's point of view, but this is often not the case. I have had many students who were quite put off by his "hypocrisy," as they called it. Holden himself admits that he's "the most terrific liar you ever saw in your life" (16). What are we to make of a narrator who admits he lies? The point I make to my students is that Salinger is trying to disrupt our notions of conventional narrative. We cannot read his characterization passively; we must engage with the text and its narrator more actively. This is one of the benefits of "alienistic" literary techniques. Anti-realistic writers like William Faulkner and Bertolt Brecht purposefully upset reader expectations and disrupt the verisimilitude of their stories to "alienate" them in a sense. An alienated reader is a reader who is not comfortable with the ideas and images of a text, and is thus forced to wrestle with them.

"Phoniness" and authentic identity

Once students have grasped the structure and point of view of the novel, that Holden is actually narrating from a psychiatric facility one year after the events of the plot, we can begin looking at specific school experiences. The first thing Holden tells us about his

school is in reference to an advertisement which claims: “Since 1888, we have been molding boys into splendid, clear thinking young men.” He informs us that “they don’t do any damn more *molding* at Pencey than they do at any other school” (2). The advertisement displays a picture of a boy jumping on a horse, which upsets Holden because he claims he has never seen a horse at the school. Although Holden is a member of the upper class, pretentiousness is what frustrates him more than anything. It is one of the behaviors which falls under his umbrella term “phony.” I must caution students from the outset to keep point of view in mind: what Holden says about Pencey is not so much a reflection of the school as it is of Holden himself. The first thing he wants us to think is that school does not play a part in “molding” him; but the subject of this entire unit is to determine whether it actually does or not.

The first actual image of instruction then is Holden’s visit to his history teacher Mr. Spencer, to whom he is saying good-bye since he has been kicked out of school. Although his portrayal of Mr. Spencer is primarily disparaging, a close reading reveals an undercurrent of need and appreciation. When Mrs. Spencer opens the door to him, Holden tells us, “I think she was glad to see me. She liked me. At least I think she did. Boy did I get in that house fast” (6). Brief moments like this in Holden’s narrative are clues to his “true” feelings, if there is such a thing in a post-modern novel. Once the reader notices Holden’s need for adult figures that care about him, his rantings and complaints are tempered. Another instance belying his hunger to be “molded” is in the midst of his interview with Mr. Spencer. At one point Mr. Spencer sits up in his chair, looking like “he had something very good, something sharp as a tack to say to me” (10), but he was merely preparing himself to throw a magazine down on the table. It will not be the first time Holden will be disappointed by a potential mentor.

One of the more meaningful parts of their conversation is when Holden explains that the headmaster, Dr. Thurmer, kept telling him that life is a game. Mr. Spencer proclaims that “Life *is* a game that one plays according to the rules.” Holden’s interior response is:

Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it’s a game all right -- I’ll admit that. But if you get on the *other* side, where there aren’t any hot-shots, then what’s a game about it?
Nothing. No game. (8)

Holden’s response surely resonates with high school students everywhere who feel that they are “losers.”

When Spencer gets to the point and asks Holden why he is failing out of school for the third time, Holden does not “feel like getting into it,” but he informs *us* quite cogently that it is “because [he] is surrounded by phonies” (13). This will be Holden’s refrain for much of the novel, and as I have stated, my students tend to have mixed reactions to Holden’s assessment. The crucial discussion that I have with my students at this point is

to deconstruct the word “phony.” Phoniness presupposes that there is such a thing as authenticity. I introduce them to the concept of socially constructed notions of identity, as opposed to Romantic notions of “finding one’s true self.” One way of viewing identity is to see life as a series of performances, even if that performance is sometimes for an audience of one -- the self. If time permits, I remind them that everyone’s favorite Shakespearean quotation: “To thine ownself be true,” comes in the middle of Polonius’ absurd list of platitudes to Laertes. Like most of his maxims, it sounds great, but what does it mean? Because coming of age novels are predominantly concerned with identity formation, an extended discussion on this topic is not digressive.

As for Mr. Spencer, Holden sums up the difficulty of learning from teachers by explaining that students and teachers are “too much on opposite sides of the pole” (15). Holden appreciates Mr. Spencer’s efforts, but the roles get in the way. Mr. Spencer must perform his role as an authority figure, and thus cannot mentor Holden in the way that he needs; and Holden must perform the role of the obsequious student. He never tells Spencer any of the important feelings that he relates in his narrative to us.

A true mentor?

The irony of the novel, at least in terms of the teacher episodes, is that the mentor with whom Holden relates crosses those role boundaries too sharply. Holden describes Mr. Antolini as “the best teacher I ever had . . . you could kid around with him without losing your respect for him” (174). When Holden visits Antolini just before his breakdown at the end of the novel, their rapport is readily apparent. Holden relates a long story about another classroom experience aloud to Mr. Antolini, whereas with Mr. Spencer, Holden gave curt polite answers. The experience he relates is about a teacher named Mr. Vinson who trained his students to yell “Digression, digression!” when a student meandered in a speech. Holden explains aloud to Mr. Antolini (the type of narrative usually reserved for Holden’s interior monologues) that he likes digression, that it is more interesting. The irony is that in telling this story, Holden assumes that Mr. *Antolini* is willing to put up with digression because he cares about him.

After this icebreaker, Mr. Antolini is able to broach some very serious subjects with Holden about the “fall” he anticipates for him and about the importance of formal education. Antolini asserts: “You are a student, whether the idea appeals to you or not. You are in love with knowledge.” His argument for the value of the school experience is utterly compelling:

Once you get past all the Mr. Vinsons, you’re going to start getting closer and closer -- that is, if you *want* to, and if you look for it and wait for it -- to the kind of information that will be very dear to your heart. Among other things you’ll find that you are not the first person who was ever confused and frightened and even sickened by human behavior. You’re by

no means alone on that score, you'll be excited and *stimulated* to know. Many, many men have been just as troubled morally and spiritually as you are right now. Happily, some of them kept records of their troubles. You'll learn from them -- if you want to. Just as someday, if you have something to offer, someone will learn something from you. It's a beautiful reciprocal arrangement. And it isn't education. It's history. It's poetry. (189)

Antolini may say "it isn't education," but I believe this passage describes and supports the endeavor I am striving for in this unit. Antolini emphasizes that reading and studying alienistic literature will "stimulate" us. Education of this sort, if found in schools, *is* poetry.

The problem with the Antolini episode is how it ends. I started by stating that he crosses the line delineated by his role as teacher too sharply, which is ironic because it is his willingness to break conventional teacher-student performance boundaries that makes him effective as a mentor. Holden dozes off to sleep, only to be awakened by Mr. Antolini's caresses. The scene is ambiguous, especially when one considers the unreliability of the narrator. Holden himself wonders whether he misinterprets Mr. Antolini's affection. What is not ambiguous is that Holden's search for adult guidance is frustrated once again, and this time more painfully because a sincere trust is breached.

Experience again

In the last chapter of the novel, Holden is back in the clinic, explaining that the psychiatrist keeps asking him if he will apply himself next year in school. Holden's summative statement is that it is a "stupid question" (213). How can he know what he will do until he does it? I read this Salinger's summation in general on the question of what role does school play in one's education. Like Bronte's message in *Jane Eyre*, it is experience which ultimately authenticates personal development and maturity. Holden cannot know until he acts.

EXPLORING THE NEGATIVE

The fundamental paradox I anticipate confronting in this entire process is that literature generally contains a negative portrayal of schooling; but that is not necessarily a problem. Exploring "the negative" is a large part of artistic and literary endeavors. Why did the Greeks enjoy tragedy? Why do most of the movies nominated for Academy awards this year have such disturbing content? My goal for the students is that we avoid a simplistic treatment of the negative portrayal of school, that we avoid "overstanding" them. Part of our class discussions that will hopefully inform the writing of their own narratives will be this subject of our attraction to the darkness. What makes Jane's impertinence so compelling, and why does Holden's ranting win us over? Why have crazed assassins been

found with copies of *Catcher in the Rye*? I want my students to wrestle with definitions of what makes “good” art. Is art supposed to teach us something? What art is “appropriate” for public school? What I see as an inescapable fact of teaching is that students are attracted to “dark” or alienistic subject matter, whether it is rebellious protagonists or gothic settings. My goal in raising questions about the nature of “art” is to force students to question assumptions they have about beauty and propriety. I want them to reflect on what the constant influx of media images, reading material, and movie overload is doing to their psyches. Most of all, though, as an English teacher I hope to demonstrate that printed literature, like these novels, is still the best way to engage with the world of ideas.

THE PRODUCT

Finally, they will be called upon to produce their own art. Some would say that no one can fully participate with other’s art--i.e. criticize and analyze it--without participating in the act of creation first. Engaging in the process of telling their own story in a written, and thus symbolic, medium will help them to become better readers and consumers of the symbolism and artifice they encounter on a daily basis.

The students will perform several writing assignments geared towards the development of their own personal narrative about the school experience. We will undergo all stages of the writing process, from prewriting to revising to publication. This assignment accomplishes two major objectives: (1) teaching the students to view writing as a process rather than a last-minute task, and (2) preparing the students for the type of personal writing they will have to do on college application essays.

Prewriting

For this assignment in particular, the development of ideas is particularly important. The students will produce a much better piece if they write about a topic they have chosen carefully. They will partake in a series of prewriting activities to accomplish this. The key to prewriting is that ideas flow freely without the inhibition of more formal writing assignments. Below is a list of possible activities:

1. A ten-minute “timed” writing (students write for ten minutes straight without stopping, no matter how absurd the content)
2. Brainstorming (students generate a list without having to explain individual items)
3. A pictorial montage (students draw four pictures in each corner of a piece of paper to represent different experiences)
4. A lifemap (students draw a timeline of their life in the form of a map)

Drafting

After the students share the results of prewriting (which is usually a lot of fun), they select an episode to write about further. It is important to stress that they will be doing this with more than one episode, so they do not need to stress over choosing just one.

Now is the time for students to begin thinking about “how” to convey their experiences. The prewriting activities are merely designed to generate ideas. Remind the students that there was a certain “art” to the way in which they told their stories to their classmates. This “art” can be transferred to their writing, it just takes practice.

Have the students do this activity **three** times. Each time, have them share their writing in small groups of three or four. Then have a few groups select one to read aloud to the entire class. Allow students to give positive feedback only at this stage of the writing process.

Revising

Eventually, after a lot of sharing, each student must select the one piece of writing that he/she will revise into a publishable piece of writing. For the revision process, the teacher may lecture some on effective lead-in methods, the use of quotations and dialogue, etc. It is very important to grade the revision in juxtaposition with the original draft to ensure that each student is fully engaging in this vital part of the writing process.

Peer Editing

I prefer to have students type their papers before bothering to make other students proofread them because the errors just get duplicated in the typing process. However, if word processors are not readily available to most of your students, they should not be required to type more than the final draft.

In addition to proofreading for grammatical and technical errors, I have students write general comments about the paper using the “sandwich” method. They must “sandwich” one critical comment between two positive comments.

Publication

Once students have received feedback from their peers, they are ready to type a final draft. Students should be given a list of typing specifications particular to you as a teacher. It is important that students become accustomed to adhering to the specific requirements of various teachers.

I call this stage “Publication” rather than “Final Draft” for two reasons: (1) Many famous authors continued to revise works previously published, and (2) finished products should be shared. If you do not allow students a venue to share and read each other’s work, you ultimately contribute to the attitude most students have that the grade is all that matters. Developing a sincere interest in the improvement of writing is the only hope for teaching writing, and sharing student success is a key method for instilling that desire.

CONCLUSIONS AND CAVEATS

It is my sincere hope that the combination of reading and writing about the school experience will allow students to engage in the sort of reflection that promotes both higher-level thinking skills and emotional well-being. Teachers must definitely approach the topic with caution, both in the readings and in the writing assignments. You do not want the class to degenerate into a “slam” session on “bad” teachers. Many students are all too willing to tell you more than you want to hear about their other teachers. The key is to help them to avoid gossip and focus on their own “coming of age” experience.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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A nineteenth century British coming of age novel about a young orphan who becomes a governess. Bronte's creation has been an icon for the development of the young feminist and is widely read in high schools in America.

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This book is part of a feminist series on literary heroines, and therefore as Macpherson characterizes Jane, it is with consistent attention to her as a model for women both of the nineteenth century and of the present.

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Poovey, Mary. "Jane Eyre and the Governess in Nineteenth-Century Britain."

Approaches to Teaching Bronte's Jane Eyre. Eds. Diane Long Hoeveler and Beth Lau. New York: MLA, 1993. 43-8.

Poovey presents a convincing case for the importance of exposing students to social issues which lie outside the text, an area of study which is popular today within the scholarly community. She investigates the role of the governess in the "hungry 1840's" and the particular social anxieties which representations like Jane reveal. Jane Eyre challenges "assumptions about the role gender should play in stabilizing the 'natural' hierarchy of class" and calls into question "the morality that contemporaries claimed was natural to women." What is specifically valuable about this article, in contrast to other materials on the subject of governessing, is Poovey's strategy for engaging students' efforts to identify historical moments and ideological instabilities.

Salinger, J. D. *The Catcher in the Rye*. Boston: Little, Brown, & Co., 1945.

A postmodern novel coming of age novel about an alienated boarding school student. Salinger's work has captured the imagination of generations of students

and adults who empathize the poignancy and humor of his maladjusted outlook on life and society.

Witham, W. Tasker. *The Adolescent in the American Novel*. New York: Ungar Publishing, 1964.

A critical survey of the writings of American authors whose work pertains to adolescence. It is a very handy reference tool, and it contains nice snippets of traditional criticism as well.