You The Boss (/)

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English 145, Department of English, UPenn: "LEARN"

On Friday, May 2nd at 3:45, at Kelly Writers House (http://writing.upenn.edu/wh/), students from LORENE CARY’s “One Book, One Philadelphia, One Penn,” and “Learn!” courses read four-minute excerpts of their own work along with selections from the work of students they’d taught at Mighty Writers West (http://www.mightywriters.org/west-philly-academy/) and Saul High School (http://webgui.phila.k12.pa.us.schools/s/saul/about-us/w.b.-saul). Penn student writers engaged the community and moved through the city: from the Rosenbach Museum and Library, to Saul High School for Agricultural Sciences, to Mighty Writers, and the Free Library. Their work reflected how they reached outward—and inward—to create stories worth hearing, and how they wrote them over and over and over again in search of structure, energy, and language sufficient to contain their ideas and passion. Brava!

We will link to the Writers House podcast as soon as it is available. Meanwhile, to view the website that our fiction writers created, linking One Book One Philadelphia to younger writers, please visit http://onebookonhenry.com (http://onebookonhenry.com).

Week 11: Drafts, even bad drafts, are due Tuesday, 22 April

Yesterday, at the Rosenbach (http://rosenbach.org/), we talked about cards and brown paper on the wall and other gimmicks to encourage the timid creative mind to play with connections, links, and a thesis. The idea is to use play to tease out of our discipline and fear the creative intelligence that forms new thought. We said that play can do sometimes what full, frontal force cannot. Now I’d also like to remind you to let your own delight lead you creation process. Intentionally.

Prompt

Close your eyes, breathe for a minute, concentrating on your breath, counting breaths, or using any of a hundred ancient, simple breathing exercises (http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html). Then, ask yourself what moment of this term’s investigation have you enjoyed most. Open your eyes and write that moment. Explore your enjoyment; was it about:

• learning the ideas,
• watching children,
• sparring with another person’s thesis,
• finding your way successfully to the school,
• remembering a moment of your own childhood when the smell of the playground came to you as the first drops of rain hit the cement,
• triumphing the third time this term (clearly I’m hopeful here, Divya!) over one of the illnesses that have kept you from talking,
• something else entirely?
After you've written that moment, write at the bottom of the page your intention to bring into the process intelligence that you may not be able to access immediately. Since I mentioned Divya, above, I'll stay with her subject, for instance:

In some way this moment connects to my intention to understand and to help stop bullying. My powerful subconscious mind has helped me find these interactions--and is helping me to interpret them. That intelligence may come in unexpected ways. I will listen and look for it.

See what thoughts, dreams, feelings come to you at odd times during the week. Jot them on your phone to remember. Line them up. What do they say?

...UPenn students find--and chronicle--urban stories of extraordinary learning that need to be told.

Week 9
This witch hazel shrub grows outside DuBois House, my first residence at UPenn. Witch hazel, the first flowering shrub of the season, provides bark and leaves to make an astringent used for sores, bruising, and skin care. Native Americans used it as medicine. European settlers also used it as a diving rod. As early as 1518 Martin Luther had condemned the use of twigs to find metals, water, or grave sites as an occult practice that violated the First Commandment.

The fruit is divided into two parts; each part contains two glossy, black seeds. In October or November, the fruit capsule explodes and shoots the seeds 30 feet and more from the shrub.

Where is the natural world in your mind and heart and spirit? Where is it in your essays? Where do your feet land? What do you see, hear, smell, taste, touch? What relationship do the seasons have to your time management? Your allergies? The events you write and think and dream of?

Week 8
What's your handicap? What do you do well without thinking? Where do we have to push? To dig under the surface to find questions that evoke full, possibly surprising answers? To write, despite anxiety, drafts that you can then improve? To reach out into the world, calling, emailing, finding people you don't know and convincing them to talk to you? What are your attack skills? How do you sidle yourself up to challenge--and throw down?

In 2012, Researchers for the National Coalition for Core Arts Standards named and defined the following four creative practices as "meta-cognitive activities" essential to arts practice across the disciplines: they "nurture the effective work habits of curiosity, creativity, and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, communication, and collaboration,
The crusty 20th-century critic Cyril Connolly writes: “Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising.” His 1938 Enemies of Promise (http://www.amazon.com/Enemies-Promise-Cyril-Connolly/dp/0226115046) is a caustic, often sexist, “inquiry into the problem of how to write a book that lasts ten years.” Our mission in English 145 is to write an essay that has both grace and heft, that reaches without over-reaching, and that is honest without simplistic confession.

That's why nearly half of today's class has been devoted to laying out the rest of the term's research, interviewing, writing, and revising. And you see how hard it was to commit. Writing is our own personal project learning (http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational_leadership/feb08/vol65/num05/Project-Based_Learning.aspx). If, in fact, you are creating something new, something that is not just an imitation of another essay or article or blog, you cannot know exactly what your creation will be, how long it will take to write or revise. We don't like to estimate without more information. We don't like to be wrong. In addition, each choice leaves behind other choices that looked good at first—and still look good in hindsight. Maybe that one would have been better. Maybe there's still time to switch...

Nonetheless, your task this week is to write a proposal for your essay or essays, and to schedule your research and writing, week by week, making marks that you have a chance to hit and room to change if you don't. Promising young writers often snag themselves on false hurdles. Impossible tasks. Ten-point research for a 4-point question. Interviewing the wrong people. Failing to report so that you get scenes and stories to allow you to show rather than tell about the exceptional learning you hope to discover. Deadlines can be useful time structures— or we can use them for excuses: With just one night to grind out this piece, I got a B; imagine if I'd had time!

There will be plenty of real hurdles. Now is the time to ensure that you do not wash up onto the deadline shore gasping and unprepared. Maybe not crazy fun today, but I look forward to reading your proposals. Do check out links to help you with background info on the Assignments page, Week 7 (http://youtheboss.weebly.com/assignments.html).

Penn Alum Morgan Neville won the Oscar for documentaries, he said, by loving to tell stories. Check it out. (http://www.thedp.com/article/2014/03/oscar-winner-penn-dp-alum)

Thanks to Meredith Stiehm (a Penn alumna who is currently the showrunner of The Bridge on FX, and executive producer of Homeland - and a friend of the Writers House), we are sponsoring a paid summer internship for this summer with Homeland. (http://www.thedp.com/article/2014/03/oscar-winner-penn-dp-alum)

This will be a 10-week internship. We don't know which 10 weeks yet, so candidates must be prepared to adjust to the schedule that would require being in Los Angeles any 10-week period between late May and late August.

Homeland will be filming on location in North Carolina, but this internship will be in the Homeland writing room in Los Angeles.

To apply, send an email to realarts@writing.upenn.edu (mailto:realarts@writing.upenn.edu) and include: a resume; a statement describing any relevant courses or other relevant experiences/projects at Penn; a statement describing why you want to be an intern with Homeland; a 2-page sample of your creative writing (fiction; verse; screenplay; creative nonfiction).

Eligible: any currently matriculated Penn undergraduate, with preference given to current juniors.

**Strict deadline is 11:59 PM on March 16.**

Arch Street Press is pleased to announce its annual prize for America's best college writer in the nonfiction category. Open to undergraduate and graduate students between the ages of 18 and 30, the Arch Street Prize is designed to stimulate interest in writing across the country and to promote today's extraordinary young writers. Arch Street Press offers each winner a standard contract together with a mentoring program and $1,000 cash prize for his/her chosen manuscript of up to 5,000 words. Please see the website (http://archstreetpress.org/arch-street-prize/ (http://archstreetpress.org/arch-street-prize/)) for full rules and submission guidelines.

Arch Street Press is an independent nonprofit publisher dedicated to the work of visionaries, social entrepreneurs and leading scholars who advance human potential.

Contact: Robert Rimm, Managing Editor, r.rimm@archstreetpress.org (mailto:r.rimm@archstreetpress.org), 484.823.0120 (tel:484.823.0120) / 215.870.8800
structure and unleash: curiosity, research, reporting, drafting, rethinking.

I'd like to ask you to rethink your critical reading, what you choose to read and how you learn from that reading; the way we at once discuss with student colleagues and a working discussion of the subject. The book adds many other voices. They all know what they are talking about. Several disagree. Have a look.

Prepare for this book reads: "Writers write. But what do they do for money?"

Oh, boy. We've talked about how an MFA may figure into your plans to write or teach writing in future. I did not attend grad school for Creative Writing, so I can only speak from the NYC side. But here is a review (http://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/26/books/mfa-vs-nyc-the-two-cultures-of-american-fiction.html?_r=0) in The New York Times by Dwight Garner of a book that gives the subject a thorough airing. It's by Chad Harbach, novelist and editor of the magazine n+1 (http://nplusonemag.com/about). Harbach's original 2009 essay (http://nplusonemag.com/mfa-vs-nyc) began his public discussion of the subject. The book adds many other voices. They all know what they are talking about. Several disagree. Have a look.

For the 11th Annual ABCS (https://www.nettercenter.upenn.edu/abcs-courses) Summit on Thursday, May 1st

You and your students are invited. All this year's ABCS classes will have a chance to share their research and recommendations as well as connect with current and potential ABCS colleagues from across the University. Please distribute this to interested colleagues as well as to all of your students. More information coming soon.

Penn Review - the oldest mainstream literary and art journal on campus - is accepting submissions of art and writing (up to 2000 words) until Sunday, February 23rd! Submit to pennreview@gmail.com!

Week 5:

**Ambition.** Where do you aim?

For this week I'd like us to think, please, about your ambition for this week's work. You could decide, rationally, to get credit for the course. If you are working an outside job, taking six courses, caring for an ailing loved one, that's a reasonable ambition. You could decide that you want to aim for a particular grade. Or that you want to be published. You could use this class to line up blogs and essays for a future website that you intend to launch in the future. You could use it to discuss with student colleagues and a working writer particular concerns you have about writing as a career.

I'd like to ask you to rethink your critical reading, what you choose to read and how you learn from that reading; the way we at once structure and unleash: curiosity, research, reporting, drafting, rethinking.
Week 4:
"I think you could have done better if you had worked harder. By work in an artist's life...I mean an integrity of purpose, a spiritual intensity, and a fine expenditure of energy that most people...have no conception of."

-Tom Wolfe

Week 3

In his essays on the Nazi extermination camps, Holocaust survivor Primo Levi (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Primo_Levi) tells a story about visiting a 5th grade class. One of the students wondered why more people didn't run away. Levi explained about searchlights and guards with guns and barbed wire. The kid then asked him to draw a picture of the camp, noting the position of the towers and guards. Levi drew a picture-map, as best as he could remember.

My husband read me this passage. We share readings all the time; it's one of the great pleasures of long marriages and friendships, this constant refreshment of new ideas on old subjects that loved ones know you continue to revisit and learn from. He knows that I began trying to understand evil by reading, slowly, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rise_and_Fall_of_the_Third_Reich), when I was twelve, and that that reading informed my later research into slavery here in the U.S. He knows that I brood on individual and cultural memory. He knows that I collect and tell myself stories of human beings who remain human no matter what.

The boy in the class studied the map on the chalkboard and came up with a plan. It involved the prisoner running across the yard, killing a guard, wearing his uniform, escaping, etc. A video game solution. He told Levi to remember it, in case he ever needed to get away again. And Levi, gracefully refraining from bad-mouthing the boy, used the incident as an example of how cultural memory fails, sliding "tastefully toward simplification and stereotype, a trend against which I would like here to erect a dyke." You are writing not just for individual readers, but to participate in this endeavor. Some of us, as a character says in Chinua Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah, are given to tell the tale. We must train ourselves to be capable.

Week 2: Write from the Center

Before we begin to interview others about their learning experiences, we have to learn how to articulate our own. Thanks for today's class, for your patience and willingness to go at it a couple times until you found where the story of your best high school experience begins. The point of today's writing followed by fast start-again rewriting was to hear our own throat-clearing and automatic writing, all of it obscuring the narrative of the experience. What happened? is the question that humans ask. Writers are sometimes so busy setting a mood, sharing ideas, being polite, or showing what we know that we forget to tell you what happened. Who did what? How did it sound and look and smell? What did I think? How did our bodies feel? What were our emotions? If you can lead the reader to feeling the same thing without saying it, all the better. But this is non-fiction, not Jamesian fiction; so sometimes you can tell.

Week 1: Making a class into a pop-up community of writers

Welcome! Come in.

English 145 at the University of Pennsylvania is a non-fiction writing course. It's also a chance for college students and a writer-lecturer to create a pop-up writing community. Once in, we create some more. You the boss: We write, edit, tell stories, find meaning.

Student writers will find and document extraordinary learning in Philadelphia schools. This course challenges student writers to articulate, argue, meditate, and persuade in traditional and new media forms stories about children's learning and the social mechanisms we create to teach them.

We will begin writing about our own education, including in-school and out-of-school learning experiences, then determine the topics individual students want to explore. A fascination with generational language learning, for instance, could lead to a woman I know, an Albanian-language counselor who translated for Albanian-born parents who came weekly to an evening seminar their children's teacher created to teach them the week's math homework—culminating in a phenomenal leap in the math scores of this group of children and the parents' joy at being able, for the first time, to help their kids in American school.

This website documents our four months together. Assignments will be posted here, along with links, reviews, and reports. We'll also decide as we go how much of our process to archive. We will discuss explicitly our responsibility to each other, to readers, to our various social, literary, and educational communities here at the University of Pennsylvania and beyond. We will read current magazines and contemporary essays. We'll read other writers talking about writing to keep us company along the way. We'll talk about writing and discipline, writing and persuasion, writing and family and money and mortality, writing as professionals and committed amateurs.

Portfolios will include students' best writing, about 10-12 pages of it. In its first year, this course is learning, too, and we will determine as the course progresses how much student writing is appropriate to publish on our website. In this first iteration, "English 145: Learn" is still determining its ambition, including the ability of university writers to create work not just to submit for a grade, but to find—and tell—urban stories of extraordinary learning that need to be told.
We’ve been snowed out! Let’s do a conference call, today, January 21, first class/snow day from 3:45 to 4:30pm.

712.432.1500

Access code: 1017958#

I’ll be on the call, hoping to meet you voice-to-voice, explain how no bus came, and I walked from downtown, only to get to class five minutes, the maintenance lady tells me, after someone told you you could leave!

Let’s also discuss the focus of your “Learn” writing this term—and an idea I’ve been thinking about to leverage the impact of your writing in our community. If you see this message too late to call, please do ring me during my office hours (see Assignments page), if possible.

Generally

Expectations

I expect that you will use this class to advance your writing practice, your thinking and feeling disciplines, your workshop and critiquing skills, and habits of reading and attending readings and lectures of other writers.

In the first four weeks we’ll read, write, do exercises, visit schools, interview learners, and lay out areas of research and study. We will discuss the progress of our projects and, as an editorial group guide each other toward better questions and answers. I will read what you write, but not comment much. I need to get to know your work before I can figure out how to help you strengthen it.

Together, we will create a website. By week five, you shall have written a bunch of new non-fiction, and maybe an essay draft or two, and we’ll begin reading as a whole. You will likely only have one or two essays read and discussed by the full workshop. Other feedback will come from small groups, individual colleagues, and from me.

I expect that you will not be absent or late except in cases of emergency or illness, that your work (about 6 hours/week) will be completed on time and with reasonable attention to the production values that make the piece available, without trouble, for your readers.

Grades

I read, comment, and assign revisions throughout the semester, but do not grade individual assignments. Instead I grade the portfolio, which you’ll submit at the end of the semester. Classroom reports and participation count. So do your written critiques, workshop leadership, and discussion. You must revise up to a B grade on drafts.