

## Writing Activities

Using writing strategies in the classroom can improve students' writing abilities, develop higher-order cognitive thinking, and increase their personal connection with literature; however, many teachers resort to using teacher-directed plot questions, as opposed to having students respond to literature. Here are some examples of teacher-directed plot questions for Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

Who can tell me why Juliet drank the sleeping potion?  
Why does Juliet's father threaten to throw her out of the house?  
Why does Friar Laurence help Romeo and Juliet?

Teacher-directed plot questions such as these were the means through which most of us read and studied Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* when we were in high school. Even at fourteen, we understood that our English teacher expected only one answer—the one the teacher wanted to hear. Although teacher-directed plot questions such as these can support a reader's understanding of text, most students have ideas that go beyond the plot. Students wonder about Juliet's rebellion against her father and whether or not Juliet's love for Romeo was genuine. These issues were never explored in the class discussions or writing assignments when we were in high school. Our teachers rarely, if ever, invited us to explore the personal questions and issues that often drive young students to read. As high school students, we desperately wanted to discuss issues and ideas from this play that extended beyond teacher-directed plot questions.

Despite our highschool experience, we (Brad and Katie) both became English teachers and were determined to push our students beyond these plot-oriented questions. We both sought methods for teaching literature that evoked students' personal and emotional responses.

Reader-response theory asserts the possibility that there is more than a single response to a text and there are differences among readers and texts. In this time of test-driven curricula, writing in the classroom has taken a back seat to ensuring comprehension of the material. However, studies have shown that when students journal and write in class, their scores on standardized test-improve *more* than when writing is not an integral part of the literature curriculum. In addition, as teachers of literature (especially as teachers of the classics), we must remember that reading literature is not only an aesthetic and literary experience, it is also a personal experience. When students personally connect with literature, it provides a larger, more valuable and empowering experience.

In this chapter, we describe writing activities that are successful in teaching the classics to students in high school classrooms. Many variables affect how students read and think about the classics, and these writing activities have been used with many different students with varied abilities in reading and writing. These strategies not only ensure that students comprehend the text, but they allow students to increase their personal interest in the text and develop methods for comprehending the material. Exhibit 5.1 shows the learning styles and types of learners that are addressed by each writing activity covered in this chapter.

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### Exhibit 5.1 Strategies and Skill Sets

<b>During-Reading Strategy</b>	<b>Appropriate for These Learning Styles</b>	<b>Multiple Intelligences</b>
Journal Writing	Visual Kinesthetic/Psychomotor	Visual/Spatial Logical/Mathematical Bodily/Kinesthetic Interpersonal
Reader-Response Logs	Visual	Musical/Rhythmic Logical/Mathematical Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal
Creative Writing	Visual	Musical/Rhythmic Logical/Mathematical Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal
Freewriting	Visual	Musical/Rhythmic Logical/Mathematical Verbal/Linguistic Intrapersonal
Literature Letters	Visual	Visual/Spatial Intrapersonal
Character Diaries	Visual	Visual/Spatial Intrapersonal

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