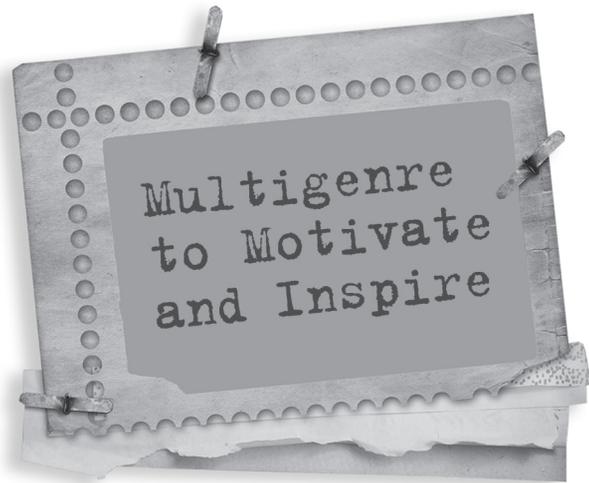


# FEARLESS WRITING



*Tom Romano*

HEINEMANN  
Portsmouth, NH

**Heinemann**  
361 Hanover Street  
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912  
www.heinemann.com

*Offices and agents throughout the world*

© 2013 by Tom Romano

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by a reviewer, who may quote brief passages in a review, with the exception of reproducible pages, which are identified by the *Fearless Writing* credit line and may be photocopied for classroom use only.

“Dedicated to Teachers” is a trademark of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.

The author and publisher wish to thank those who have generously given permission to reprint borrowed material:

Excerpt from “Teacher-Student Conferencing: A Way to Writing Improvement” by Tom Romano. Originally appeared in the *English Language Arts Bulletin*, Winter/Spring 1982 (vol. 23, pp. 6-19). Reprinted by permission of the *Ohio Journal of English Language Arts*.

Excerpt from “If You Talk in Your Sleep” written by Johnny Christopher and Bobby “Red” West. Used by permission of Elvis Music Inc., c/o Carlin America, Inc.

Excerpts from “At the Cancer Clinic” by Ted Kooser from *Delights & Shadows*. Copyright © 2004 by Ted Kooser. Reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of Copper Canyon Press, www.coppercanyonpress.org.

“Waiting for the Dog” from *Whale Song: A Poet’s Journey into Cancer* by Kenneth W. Brewer. Copyright © 2013 by Dream Garden Press and the estate of Kenneth Brewer. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from Chapter 19 originally appeared in “Teaching Writing from the Inside” by Tom Romano from *Adolescent Literacy* by Kyrene Beers, Robert E. Probst, and Linda Rief. Copyright © 2007 by Kyrene Beers, Robert E. Probst, and Linda Rief. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.

“The Truth About Why I Love Potatoes” by Mekeel McBride from *Dog Star Delicatessen: New and Selected Poems 1979-2006*. Copyright © 2001 by Mekeel McBride. Reprinted by permission of The Permissions Company, Inc., on behalf of Carnegie Mellon University Press, www.cmu.edu/universitypress.

“To My Colleagues in the Field” by Tom Romano from *College Composition and Communication* (vol. 41, no. 4, December 1990). Reprinted by permission of the National Council of Teachers of English.

Excerpts from Sections I, II, IV, and V originally appeared in “The Many Ways of Multigenre” by Tom Romano from *Teaching the Neglected “R”* by Tom Newkirk and Richard Kent, editors. Copyright © 2007 by Tom Newkirk and Richard Kent. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH. All rights reserved.

Excerpts from the *Common Core State Standards* © Copyright 2010. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Romano, Tom.

Fearless writing : multigenre to motivate and inspire / Tom Romano.

pages cm

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-0-325-04806-2

1. Language arts (Middle school)—United States. 2. Language arts (Secondary)—United States. 3. English language—Rhetoric—Study and teaching. 4. Report writing—Study and teaching. 5. English language—Style. 6. Literary form. I. Title.

LB1631.R593 2013

428.0071’2—dc23

2013009193

*Editor:* Tobey Antao

*Production:* Hilary Zusman

*Cover design:* Judy Arisman

*Interior design:* Shawn Girsberger

*Typesetter:* Shawn Girsberger

*Manufacturing:* Steve Bernier

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

17 16 15 14 13 VP 1 2 3 4 5

# contents

now where you're  
and stories and

## SECTION I Origins, Definitions, Sample Multigenre Paper 1

- 1 **Personal History: A Shift in the Territory** 2  
■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “Unfinished Music #1—John” 2
- 2 **Why Read *Fearless Writing*?** 4
- 3 **Definition of Multigenre** 8
- 4 **Some Multigenre History: Dialog with a Skeptic** 9  
*Melding fact and imagination*
- 5 **Definition of Multigenre in the Spirit of Multigenre** 16
- 6 **What’s Wrong with Exposition? (Well-Written, Pointed, Voiceful Exposition, of Course)** 17  
*Writing as mural, not snapshot*
- 7 **Narrative Thinking** 20  
*“Logic and sermons never convince,  
The damp of the night drives deeper into my soul”*  
■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “Grey Area” 21
- 8 **“Make ‘Em Write One”** 23
- 9 **Multigenre Before Multigenre** 25  
*Surprising facts about writers blending genres*
- 10 **Multigenre Interlude** 27  
■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “Motivation Massacre 2007” 29

## SECTION II Assignment and Preparation 42

- 11 **The Many Ways of Multigenre** 43  
*Multigenre assignment: specific instructions with room to soar*  
Multigenre Anxiety 46

## 12 **Multigenre Through Media** 49

*Introduce multigenre with Ken Burns’ Jazz*

## 13 **Tilling the Garden: Idea Exploration and Research Design** 52

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “Five Multigenre Ideas with Annotations” 54

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “MGP Research Design” 57

## 14 **Memo for a Final Boost** 62

*Encouragement, research strategies, flow*

## SECTION III What to Write, How to Write It 66

### 15 **What to Write About** 67

*Alert students to places where writing hides*

### 16 **Don’t Run from Exposition** 72

*Vividly explain, cogently argue (sometimes with sass)*

■ **STUDENT VOICES:** Expository writing 73

### 17 **Crafting Narrative** 77

*Anchoring multigenre in story  
Flashes: characters who yearn*

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “Treasure Lost” 80

### 18 **Quality Writing** 82

*Personify abstractions: “Procrastination sits around in his bathrobe”*

■ **STUDENT VOICES:** “Regret,” “Exhaustion,” “Freewriting,” “History and Tradition” 83

*Revision is the party*

### 19 **Poetry** 89

*What makes poems poems*

“Near the End” by Nancy McDonald 89

“Waiting for the Dog” and writing process comments by Ken Brewer 94

Student Poem that Sucks 96

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “taste” 97

**20 Easing into Poetry Through Imitation 99**

“Report to Ken Brewer, Poet Laureate of Utah”  
by Tom Romano 99

■ **STUDENT VOICES:** “Where I’m From,” “The Truth  
About Why I Dig,” and “Unit Of Measure” 101

“The Truth About Why I Love Potatoes” by  
Mekeel McBride 103

**21 Prose Poetry 108**

*The lively hybrid without rhyme or line*

■ **STUDENT VOICES:** “Making Meaning,” “Cold,”  
“Twice a Year the Library Bustles” 110

**22 Prose Poem or Flash Fiction—  
Which? 112**

“Trouble Sleeping” by Tom Romano 112

**23 Where the Mind Wanders, Part I: Stream  
of Consciousness 115**

*Capture the illusion and glory of raw thought:  
courting spontaneity*

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “on a bus in germany/  
switzerland in june after high school  
graduation” 117

**24 Where the Mind Wanders, Part II: Writing  
Dreams 119**

*Imagine dreamscapes to reveal character*

“Brad’s Dream” by Donald M. Murray 120

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “Recurring Dream” 123

**25 Innovative Genres 125**

*Often, the best parts of multigenre papers arise  
organically from the material and the writer  
at work*

■ **STUDENT VOICES:** “The Learning Abled: A  
Definition,” Visual Elements, “The Little Mermaid  
Uncovered,” Dedications 126

**SECTION IV Prime Spots 134**

**26 Don’t Dis the Beginning 135**

*Arouse readers’ interest from the start*

■ **STUDENT VOICES:** Four multigenre  
beginnings 136

**27 Of Golden Threads and Unity: “I  
Remember That!” 141**

*Introduce unity through film*

*Employ artful repetition to unify: five strategies*

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** Ellen’s Golden Thread 147

**28 Another Rhetorical Space 150**

*Create endnotes that enlighten*

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “How I Became a Writer in the  
Sixth Grade” and corresponding endnote 152

*A ghost from teaching past: Jonathan*

**SECTION V Evaluation and Reflection 156**

**29 Evaluation and Learning 157**

*An unconventional rubric*

*When rubric turns trivial: Marina*

**30 Self-Assessment: Raising the Blinds 169**

■ **STUDENT VOICE:** “I don’t need another rubric for  
why I missed the mark” 169

**31 Pre-Game: Multigenre Meets the  
Common Core Standards 177**

**32 What’s Right and Wrong with the  
Standards for Writing 181**

**33 Something Hot and Savory 191**

**WORKS CITED 195**

**ACKNOWLEDGMENTS 199**

## Personal History

### *A Shift in the Territory*

FIRST, A STORY FROM DEEP INTO MY TEACHING LIFE:

Mid-May, 1988. Not much school left. Not many more written words by 150 teenagers. It's evening. My daughter, home from track practice, has commandeered the family room. She eats leftover broccoli and cheese casserole, talks on the telephone, keeps an eye on a television sitcom, and somewhere amid all that does homework.

One room away I sit at my desk, a glass of red wine within reach, a stack of research papers near. I am undaunted. These papers are the fruition of a new research assignment I've tried with high school seniors. Instead of producing expository papers, students are writing in many genres. Although each piece is self-contained, making a point of its own, taken together, all the writing creates a unified whole. I call the assignment a "multigenre research paper."

I reach for Brian's. What a great kid. School plays, musicals, chorus—a delightful young man who combines intellect, wit, and irresistible charm. Students from every clique in school like Brian. Teachers, too, from the chemistry lab to the art room. Brian has written his multigenre research paper about John Lennon, his musical-social-political hero who was murdered in 1980, when Brian was nine years old. He's titled the paper "The Long and Wonderful Odyssey of the Walrus—A Heart Play." I turn to the first piece of writing (Romano 1995, 122):

#### *Unfinished Music #1—John*

He hit the pavement  
ass-first  
Yoko raised  
his  
head.  
He wanted to embrace her

but a hundred people  
were  
standing on  
his arms.

Oh, God, Yoko, I've been shot

I stop sipping wine. I hear neither the sitcom's laugh track nor my daughter's occasional outbursts of personality. I am rapt, immersed in a world of fact, imagination, and creativity—all this woven together by a high school kid. I am a progressive English teacher with sixteen years' experience, a master's degree in English Education, and an active professional life as an associate of the Ohio Writing Project. Still, during these weeks in May when students show me what can be done with multigenre, I sense my teaching, my very career, shifting forever.

2

**Why Read  
Fearless  
Writing?**

IT WILL ROUSE YOUR PASSION FOR EXCELLENT WRITING.

You will resonate to many written voices singing their songs.

You will think. You will question. You will learn.

I can't guarantee that multigenre will alter your career as it did mine. I'm not even sure that's a good idea. You are, no doubt, leading students to engage in productive, challenging composing. I do believe, however, that multigenre will expand your notion of writing and teaching writing. You'll awaken to different ways that students may communicate their learning. And I'm counting on this: reading my ideas about teaching writing will spur your own.

You won't find multigenre mentioned in the Common Core Standards for writing. That doesn't surprise me, given the Common Core's veiled dismissal of any writing that smacks of creativity and imagination. Even so, through multigenre, students can meet many writing standards demanded in the Common Core. Multigenre doesn't have to be an add-on. Imperative skills and concepts can be woven naturally into it—text types, research skills, rhetorical strategies, voice, point of view, grammar, usage, punctuation, genre study, expressive writing to launch all writing, revision, and the reading of wide-ranging nonfiction texts as writers hungrily pursue their research interests.

In the twenty-five years I've taught multigenre, I've seen it spread across the land. I've seen Kentucky Educational Television produce a series of eight videos about teaching writing in middle school, one of which is devoted exclusively to multigenre (KET 2004). To my classroom one summer at the University of New Hampshire, I welcomed Barry Lane, that itinerant troubadour of teaching writing. Barry shot brief video of me explaining multigenre. That evening I saw it on YouTube complete with titles and music (Lane 2009). I've had teachers elementary school through college tell me how multigenre has transformed their teaching. I've had students tell me of the power of multigenre, like Daniel, one of my college students:

Creating a multigenre paper was like having the handcuffs taken off my writing. At first I had no idea what to do, but as I began writing, the paper seemed to shape itself. I was able to write in new styles that I've always been interested in but never tried. This paper helped me to grow as a writer because it allowed me to be expressive, take risks, and share my opinion.

Multigenre has caught on, I believe, because students and teachers find it motivating and inspiring. I've found it most effective to lead students into multigenre writing near the end of a semester or year. By that time students have renewed their acquaintance with a number of genres through their reading and writing. Multigenre is the opportunity to synthesize their genre savvy. And nothing I know of has worked better at rekindling students' academic energy and keeping end-of-year writing doldrums at bay.

The question might arise, though: Is multigenre fluff? Is it serious intellectual work? Isn't writing analytically about someone else's creation really what counts as being academically rigorous? You'll have to decide where you stand on that. As a reader, writer, and teacher I know where I stand. I've read literature since I was a child. I've devoted my life to teaching English language arts. I believe that writing a novel, play, poem, or creative nonfiction is a rigorous activity that melds intellect and emotion, fact and imagination, design and spontaneity.

Multigenre research writing shows faith in students as meaning makers who participate in creating the big world mural of writing. It isn't just literary royalty that gets to write something other than analytical essays—not just Dickens and Kingsolver, Keats and Kooser, Shakespeare and Ephron, Dafoe and Lamott. It's Holly and Carmon, too. Mark and Marina. Eduardo and Darius. Multigenre is democratic, inclusive, and creative (as all writing is when we approach it as writers who use language as the creative medium).

I've divided *Fearless Writing* into five sections:

In Section I, which you're amidst right now, I tell you some of the interesting history of multigenre in our literary heritage. At the end of this section I include a complete multigenre paper by one of my students. You can also go to [www.users.muohio.edu/romanots](http://www.users.muohio.edu/romanots) and read a dozen more multigenre papers by my college students.

In Section II, I share how I've learned to prepare students to write multigenre papers, setting up assignments that urge them to explore, plan, and expand their thinking. Although I welcome inspiration in my own writing, I don't wait for it to strike. I don't let my students wait either. I jump-start their thinking, which leads them to further writing, further genres, further discovery.

In Section III, I describe genres and subgenres students might try that can form the core of their multigenre papers. This section comprises nearly a third of the book. Practical ideas abound.

In Section IV, I alert you to three components I've found critical to creating successful multigenre papers: beginnings, golden threads, and endnotes.

In Section V, I discuss how I grade multigenre papers. If you know my previous work, you might raise your eyebrows to learn I've created a rubric I hope keeps me thorough, rigorous, fair, and appreciative. I've also written two chapters about multigenre's fit with the Common Core Standards for writing.

Last night on public television's "Great Performances" I watched the Beatles' *Magical Mystery Tour*. Although many know the album, fewer know the film created by and starring the "Fab Four," as the group was called at the beginning of the British rock-'n'-roll invasion that featured hermits, animals, dreamers, searchers, stones, zombies, and troggs. Although British television viewers saw the *Magical Mystery Tour* once, in December 1967, American viewers had never seen it.

Every book I've written has been a kind of magical mystery tour. There were stretches when I was absolutely sure of the journey ahead. There were setbacks, doubts, and dead ends too, times when I was stymied, wondering which way to go. There were breakthroughs, surprises of language and insight. There was the quiet exhilaration of surging to the finish.

Hemingway said that “easy writing makes hard reading.” I’m a believer in that. My early draft—usually overwritten here, underwritten there, and off the mark—only hints at my final thinking several revisions later. I do what it takes to get there. I wouldn’t call my writing process hard. But it requires work, work I find fulfilling. Every failure I discover in diction, syntax, rhythm, and meaning leads to success as I tinker, revise, and polish. If I’ve done my job, your reading of *Fearless Writing* will be easy. I hope it’s also rewarding.

## What's Right and Wrong with the Standards for Writing

I DON'T THINK THE STANDARDS WILL DO IN MULTIGENRE. Teachers who discover the energy and motivating power of multigenre will continue to use it at every grade level, even though there will be plenty of interpretation about the Standards' strictures, even though school systems will be tempted to buy teacher-proof Common Core curricular materials, even though multigenre doesn't fit neatly into any of the "text types" the Standards mandate. Here's what teachers understand multigenre does for students that will make it hard to kill off:

- Students experience the exhilaration of conducting inquiry driven by a personal need to know and the opportunity to communicate in multiple genres.
- Students experience how creativity and imagination are vital components of thoughtful research.
- Students exercise multiple intelligences.
- Students practice skills of analysis and synthesis.
- Students learn to be expansive in their writing.
- Students practice and refine research skills and examine the credibility of sources.
- Students learn note taking, bibliographic formatting, and creation of informative endnotes.
- Students learn to write interesting exposition.
- Students practice skills of grammar, usage, punctuation, and spelling. In fact, because multigenre writing engenders such excitement, students may be more inclined to take care in correcting the mechanics of their papers.
- Students experience the synergy of sharing ideas and accomplishment with peers who have similar goals.
- Students experience agency as they shape and structure their papers and show what they know beyond teachers' expectations.

- Multigenre addresses a multitude of Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards in writing, reading, research, and language.

## A Closer Look at the Standards for Writing

It's not that the Standards for writing are bad. There is something for everyone in them. I can't read the Standards without respecting the time, thought, and language craft expended in producing them. You soon see that the Standards "put particular emphasis on students' ability to write sound arguments on substantive topics and issues, as this ability is critical to college and career readiness" (National Governors Association, Appendix A, CCSS 2011b, 24). In fact, the text of the Standards itself is an argument proposing and defending a "vision of what it means to be a literate person in the twenty-first century" (National Governors Association, Introduction CCSS 2011a, 5). The problem is that the Standards' vision for writing is narrow, biased, and incomplete. Sometimes the Standards feel divorced from the reality of teaching. They who wrote them are dismissive of writing that is something other than exposition, though narrative is given a nod as a "text type." Below are three of the four areas of writing that the Standards specify students should understand and be able to do:

### *Production and Distribution of Writing*

4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
6. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

### *Research to Build and Present Knowledge*

7. Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
9. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

### *Range of Writing*

10. Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011a, 41).

There is much to like there (and nothing incompatible with multigenre). I, too, want clarity and coherence. I exhort my college students to keep in mind—especially after writing is launched—their purpose and audience. I push students to experience the clarifying power of revision. We want students to grow ever more sophisticated in their use of technology, and to “write to be read,” as Ken Macrorie put it (1976), to write writing that works with readers. And is anyone against students using research to build and present knowledge? I would add here, however, that number 9 leaves the door open for a steady writing diet of analytical essays about literature, a narrow subgenre that has been, to my mind, overused in English language arts classrooms. Even “Range of Writing” I don’t object to. My idea of bliss is “extended time frames,” several months, say, of daily writing on a book manuscript. I want students to develop similar stamina for big writing projects. And writing with facility, even in “a single sitting”? Who doesn’t want the quality of email, text messages, and tweets to be clear and substantive? (OK, I’ve got my tongue in my cheek. The Standards probably have in mind writing under testing conditions.) In a side note, the Standards declare that students “must have the flexibility, concentration, and fluency to produce high-quality first-draft text under tight deadlines. . . .” (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011a, 41). A line from Shakespeare comes to mind: “’Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished.”

These three areas of writing fit comfortably with multigenre.

My objection comes with the first category of the Standards for writing: “Text Types and Purposes,” which, I believe, is shortsighted, exclusive, and biased against creativity. And creativity, regardless of the genre being written, is the heart of linguistic expression, that generative quality of language that makes extended thought possible, whether writing a poem, a position paper, or a grocery list. Here is the Standards’ first category that I omitted earlier:

*Text Types and Purposes\**

1. Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or text using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

---

\*These broad types of writing include many subgenres. See Appendix A for definitions of key writing types. (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011a, 41)

It is the third “text type” I object to: Narrative. And I say this as a writer who sees narrative as the heartbeat of his writing. But for the Standards to single out narrative to the exclusion of all other genres that are not argument or informative/explanatory . . . really? What about making sure students write poetry? And drama? What about making sure students try bending and breaking rules of standard writing as a way of communicating powerfully, as Virginia Woolf and e. e. cummings did, as contemporary creative nonfiction writers do? What about making sure that all students—those who will become accountants and lawyers, as well as those who will become artists—write creatively?

I followed the asterisk after “Text Types and Purposes” to Appendix A. There the Standards elaborated on narrative, pointing out that it “can be used for many purposes, such as to inform, instruct, persuade, or entertain. In English language arts, students produce narratives

that take the form of creative fictional stories, memoirs, anecdotes, and autobiographies” (National Governors Association, Appendix A, CCSS 2011b, 23). Sound thinking, I believe, that links to another laudable assertion: “The Standards require that students be able to incorporate narrative elements effectively into arguments and informative/explanatory texts” (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011b, 65). For years I have argued—often in the face of dogged opposition—that story/anecdote/narrative has a natural place in expository writing as a way to draw readers in, illustrate claims, add imagery, and people our prose (a sure way to heighten readers’ interest). The Standards’ understanding of the power of narrative heartened me. And then I saw a shaded, boxed bit of language beside the discussion of narrative:

### **Creative Writing Beyond Narrative**

The narrative category does not include all of the possible forms of creative writing, such as many types of poetry. The Standards leave the inclusion and evaluation of other such forms to teacher discretion. (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011b, Appendix A, 23)

At first blush that clarification seems inclusive of multiple genres in that big world mural of writing. At second blush, however, I see those two boxed sentences as placating and dismissive. The writers of the Standards simply do not value creative writing. They essentially remove from students’ writing repertoire the stock in trade of English language arts classrooms—literature: fiction, poetry, drama, experimental writing, prose poems, flashes, meditations, prayers, stream of consciousness, and so much more.

“The inclusion and evaluation” of creative writing beyond narrative, the Standards leave to “teacher discretion.” How magnanimous of the Standards. How trusting of teachers’ expertise and judgment, since the Standards leave no other text type to teacher discretion. Students *must* write arguments, *must* write informative/explanatory pieces, *must* write narratives. Why is creative writing left to teacher discretion? I fear that many teachers will be so bedeviled by the pressure to teach argumentative writing—the text type likely to be called for on a standardized test—that they will neglect creative writing

altogether. The Standards point out that narrative does not include “all the possible forms of creative writing.” That seems an odd assertion. Who would expect narrative to be inclusive of all creative writing? Poetry doesn’t have to be narrative. Neither do all subgenres and hybrids of creative writing. Rather, narrative is more properly sheltered under the text type of creative writing. My hunch, however, is that the Standards writers did not want creative writing given the status of “text type.” That would give it too much legitimacy. The Standards writers want to omit creative writing without seeming to. So it appears in an appendix.

Some will argue that I’m making too much of this, that even though it is in an appendix, creative writing is still a part of the Standards. I can’t argue against that. But I can point this out: By placing it in an appendix with a two-sentence, dismissive caveat, the Standards diminish creative writing, give it second-class status, sanction its neglect under the guise of leaving it to teacher discretion. In fact, the text type of narrative, which is the closest the Standards come to creative writing, is undermined by the Standards document itself. Appendix C is composed of samples of student writing that would meet the Standards. Nineteen pieces of writing are presented by seventh through twelfth graders. Eighteen of these samples are categorized as either argument or informative/explanatory. The one narrative was written by an eighth grader (National Governors Association, Appendix C, CCSS 2011c). Though implicit, the message is clear: teachers may slight narrative. The Standards sure have.

Why did the Standards writers do this? Was it that the world of creative writing is simply too vast, which the little box seems to indicate by noting “all the possible forms of creative writing”? Or are there other, more insidious reasons for marginalizing creative writing?

Is it a devaluing, even a dismissal, of imaginative thinking that Albert Einstein and Immanuel Kant so valued?

Is it to make English classrooms more like business and technical writing classrooms?

Is it an assault on cushy thinking that many believe creative writing represents, primarily, I think, because they have never experienced its rigors? (I can still hear a guidance counselor say to me when I was a

young teacher nearly forty years ago, “How can you grade creative writing? It’s whatever comes out, right? It’s creative.”)

Is it because the Standards writers thought that their argument touting expository writing would be stronger if they simply minimized creative writing, while appearing to respect its breadth and depth?

Whatever the reasons the Standards writers had for marginalizing creative writing, I resist. I’m with high school English teacher Judy Michaels, who wrote in response to demands that students be trained to write clearly and concisely, in the way business people want to read,

Okay, clarity and concision are fine, but as a teacher of the art and craft of writing, I’d like to help produce not only future employees in the global economy but also imaginative friends, siblings, lovers, neighbors, grown sons and daughters, and parents of imaginative teenagers. (Michaels 2011, 7)

The Standards relegation of creative writing to second-class status is a slap to that “art and craft of writing.” It’s rotten guidance to English teachers, too: “By all means,” it implies, “have students read creative writing produced over the centuries, but to ensure that students are college and career ready, it is unnecessary to have them engage in such writing themselves.” The Standards do not value ways of thinking and knowing that creative writing offers, at least as far as students are concerned. Imagination? Trifling. Associative thinking? Of little importance. A poet’s eye for detail? Come now.

The Standards want writing that’s all head, no heart.

In *Holding on to Good Ideas in a Time of Bad Ones* (one of the most important books about literacy education in the last twenty-five years), Thomas Newkirk lays out the range of discourse he finds essential: expressive, informational, persuasive, literary (Newkirk 2009, 152). Newkirk’s second and third categories align with the Standards, though instead of the word *argument*, he uses *persuasive*. Newkirk’s fourth category—literary—beats and includes the Standards’ text type of “narrative.” I’m guessing the Standards writers wanted to avoid *literary*, a term that makes some people uncomfortable, since so many as adolescents were overmatched by classic, literary texts and may also have been bludgeoned with strict interpretations of them to the

exclusion of their own budding powers of reader response. *Literary* might also suggest elitism and condescension, as in “literary snobs.”

I have to say though, “Too bad if *literary* makes someone uncomfortable.” The Standards tout the use of disciplinary-specific language. *Literary* is about as disciplinary-specific as we can get in English language arts. *Literary* encompasses everything from the limericks of Anonymous to the abstract expository prose of Ralph Waldo Emerson. I also prefer the word *literary* to *creative*. Say the words “creative writing” and you often encounter an immediate dichotomy: some people dismiss creative writing as fluff; others believe it is sacred, something reserved only for the most talented writers. Creativity is not exclusive to narrative, poetry, and drama. Every act of writing is an act of creativity with language as the creative medium.

## Two Further Gaps in the Standards for Writing

### *Mentor Texts*

In Robert Frost’s “Mending Wall” two neighbors meet each spring to repair the stone wall between their properties, rebuilding it to eliminate the gaps that have appeared over the winter. The Standards for writing, I believe, could also use mending. Frost’s narrator says:

“‘Before I built a wall I’d ask to know  
What I was walling in or walling out,  
And to whom I was like to give offense’” (Frost 1969, 34)

The Standards have sought to wall out creativity, imagination, and narrative ways of knowing. And they’ve offended many teachers, especially teachers like me who want literary writing to have the status of argument and informative/explanatory texts.

“Standard 9 stresses the importance of the writing-reading connection by requiring students to draw upon and write about evidence from literary and informational texts” (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011a, 8). I applaud the Standards for using the language of “writing-reading connection,” but oh, what a narrow view of it the Standards advance, harnessing the writing-reading connection only in the service of gathering evidence for writing arguments. There are other,

more fundamental, connections between writing and reading: Both are active processes of meaning making. Writers and readers choose topics, immerse themselves in language, reread for understanding, revise their thinking. Breadth and depth of reading usually make for stronger writers. And students who begin to think like writers, actively using elements of writing craft, become more appreciative readers.

The strongest writing-reading connection is perhaps the use of mentor texts to teach students about writing craft and text possibilities. Scott Fitzgerald finally began selling short stories to *The Saturday Evening Post* after he learned the kind of story structure the magazine preferred. This he discovered by outlining short stories published in the *Post*. I wrote my first free verse poem after immersion in Marge Piercy's work. Nowhere in the Standards for writing do I see mention of "mentor texts"—of students looking to see, for example, how Anne Lamott structures an essay and then trying that out in their own attempts, of writing persuasive commentaries patterned after the op-ed columns of Maureen Dowd or Charles Blow, of writing poems that use techniques of Mary Oliver, Ken Brewer, or Mekeel McBride. On the concept of mentor texts as models for student writing, the Standards are silent.

### *Expressive Writing*

By not including Newkirk's first category in his range of discourse—*expressive*—the Standards reveal a second significant gap: a spurning of writing process. The Standards don't mention expressive writing, yet without it, there is little chance students will write vivid narratives, clear explanations, elegant arguments. Expressive writing is where we start when we pour forth first words, seeking to make meaning from fragmented, chaotic inner speech. Expressive writing is writing closest to our speaking voice, the seedbed from which all other writing grows. Expressive writing with all its stumbles, indiscretions, lucidity, and exuberance gets us to our essays, reports, poems, and stories. Look at our notebooks—expressive writing. Look at our letters—expressive writing. Look at our drafts—expressive writing. When we begin to write anything, often with much doubt about what we will produce, we must keep faith in expressive writing.

"The aim of the Standards is to articulate the fundamentals, not to set out an exhaustive list or set of restrictions that limits what

can be taught beyond what is specified herein” (National Governors Association, CCSS 2011a, 6). If expressive writing is not fundamental to learning to write, nothing is. Expressive writing is an absolute basic skill for students to learn to produce routinely with faith and fearlessness so language can work its generative magic. That expressive writing is absent from the Standards reveals profound ignorance about how writing is created or a calculated omission.

I don’t really know if Multigenre will win its big match at the Crucible of Composition. The Standards has certainly opened the door to the possibility that teachers—conscientious teachers who want to do right by their students—will exclude any kind of writing from the curriculum that isn’t argument, informative/explanatory, and narrative (with even the slighting of narrative a possibility). I know that multigenre encompasses the Standards’ “range of discourse” and much more.

Many of us became English teachers because we thrilled to the big world mural of literature. We loved the grand stories of good, evil, yearning, and redemption. We smiled at ornery limericks. We imagined characters strutting and fretting their time on stage. We memorized lines from poems that spoke our unarticulated feelings. And when we got our own classrooms, we opened those imaginative worlds to students. That meant not only having students read the visions of authors, but also writing their own visions. We knew they would grow as language users if we broadened their possibilities for expression, if they tried writing stories that mattered to them as well as lucid explanations, if they created the precise imagery of poetry as well as extended arguments, if they cut loose with expressive writing in notebooks, journals, and first drafts as well as polished writing they let go to readers.

Maybe Roger and Fiona are wrong-headed in attaching so much significance to the match between the Standards and Multigenre. Maybe there doesn’t need to be a winner. It’s harmony I’m after. Multigenre is large. It contains multitudes. Despite the biases and the gaps I see in the Standards from my perspective of forty-plus years teaching writing, they, too, are large. I hope teachers see that. And if they come to believe in multigenre writing, I hope teachers boldly step forth, exercise discretion, and teach what the Standards omit, thereby mending them.