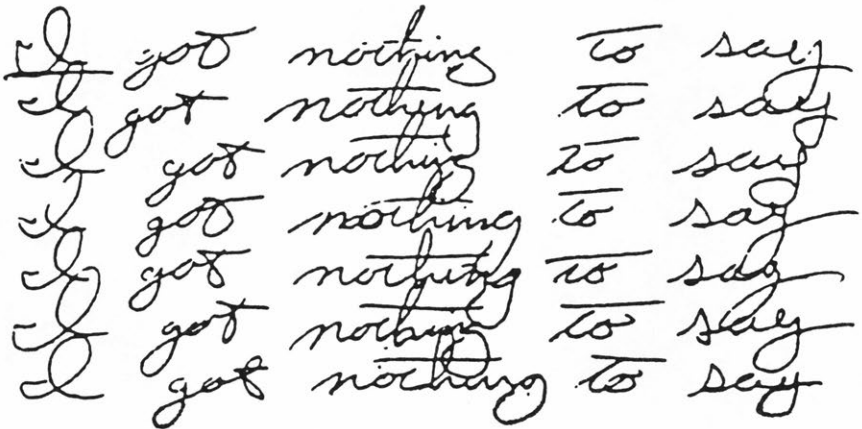


Teaching Special Education History Using Writing-to-Learn Strategies

Ray Marik
Seattle School District, Washington

It is easy to believe that special education students have many problems with writing. Many teachers have seen samples similar to the following and have regarded this as evidence that these students cannot and are not willing to learn even rudimentary writing skills, much less the more sophisticated aspects of expository composition. For example, Bobby has five-minute, **focused writing** assignments, but stubbornly writes these entries instead of responding to the history lesson.



I got nothing to say
I got nothing to say
I got nothing to say
I got nothing to say
I got nothing to say
I got nothing to say
I got nothing to say

When occasionally he does have something else to say, it comes out like this:



I wish we did not have to
do this work I think it is a waste

stupid thing to do I wish
in stead of doing this we can
see some rated X or R movies

I wish we did not have to do this work, I think it is stupid thing to do I wish in stead of doing this we can see some rated X or R movies.

During this same time Paul writes about his main interest, sports.

Last year very body think KJ was
the most valuable player but magic
johnson was

Last year everybody think KJ was the most valuable player but magic johnson was.

From these and hundreds of other scraps of writing, I, too, concluded that special education students lacked the interest, academic background, and conceptual skills to benefit much from writing instruction. To some degree I still believe this, because the writing-to-learn approach described in this chapter will not work with all special education students. The more profoundly mentally handicapped and the severely disturbed benefit little from this approach.

There is, however, a "shadow" group in special education classes that goes almost unnoticed because of the enormous energy required to deal simultaneously with extremely disabled or disturbed students. This group represents a rough midpoint between the two extremes of disabled and disturbed which, when scheduled together for a period of instruction, can benefit from the writing-to-learn process. This chapter describes my work with such a group. In that group, the grade level averaged 4.5 and ranged in attitude from Bobby's initial antagonism at being required to say something to Scott's willingness to think and draw personal conclusions about selected events. These nine juniors in my U.S. history class still have substantial learning problems, but writing to learn helped them gain insights into history and themselves that

would not have been possible in a “read the chapter,” “answer the questions,” or “do this ditto” routine.

I set four major goals for myself during this course:

1. To generate interest in history by having students make intense, personal connections with the material presented.
2. To teach some aspects of expository composition in the process of teaching about history.
3. To assist students to think on higher levels by giving writing-to-learn assignments.
4. To have the students produce a final essay as a complement to the writing-to-learn process.

Although my lessons are outwardly aimed at a final product or essay, I confess to a fascination with the excitement and mystery of the cognitive processes. These processes, more than any other, are the “guts” of what matters. As such, the final drafts, of which students are so proud, are anticlimactic in relation to processes they used to get there. For this reason, I do not feel a need to grade the essays, but I know I must grade nearly everything.

The Journal

The U.S. history course starts in the fall with a **journal** or thinkbook writing assignment. Thinkbooks (a term used by Anne Wotring) consist of approximately fifteen pages of lined notebook paper, stapled together with a “fancy” cover.

The purpose is to provide a place where students can write five- to ten-minute personal reactions to a quotation, statement, or question from the teacher, from a reading assignment, or another student’s comments.

Besides functioning as a method of keeping students “on task” (because they never can be certain when in the instructional hour a thinkbook activity may develop, or be assigned), it has a more important purpose. Primarily, I want to encourage students to make higher level connections among data, events, trends, and action. This is a sample assignment from the first day.

Write for five minutes on any of the following:

1. Tell how you feel about studying history. Write the first thoughts that come to mind.
2. List all the major events in U.S. history that you can remember.
3. Define what you believe is U.S. history. Begin: U.S. history is

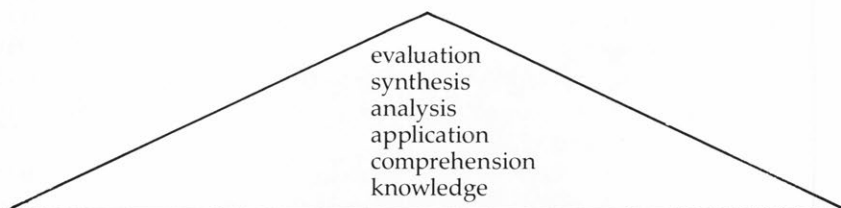
4. Relate an important moment in history to your life.
5. Decide (evaluate) what might be the four most important events in U.S. history. Tell why.

The first word in each statement (tell, list, define, relate, decide) relates to a specific cognitive level in Bloom's *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (1956). Statements 1 and 2 relate to level 1, knowledge; statement 3 relates to level 2, comprehension; statement 4 relates to level 3, application; statement 5 relates to level 6, evaluation. Students are free to choose any statement to write about. Scott selected statement 3:

United States history is the things that happened before we were a country, when we were in the wars, and all the stuff that happened afterward. It's the way people do things, how we got through crisis, and what happened after the crisis.

Students share these thinkbook entries by reading aloud what they have written, and when Scott finishes reading his entry, I ask the class for samples of "stuff" that happened in U.S. history. Their responses range from the 1980 Mount Saint Helens eruption to selected impressions from World War II seen on television. I ask many questions and try to move students into expressing higher-level connections. We may start with a lower-level written response but end up "seeing" higher-level applications.

Students became very much aware of cognitive levels when I drew a large triangle on a piece of cardboard and then printed Bloom's six cognitive levels on it.



Whenever higher-level connections are written or discussed, I point to this card and ask what level of thinking is being expressed. At first this is a very slow process with many blank faces and little articulation. After a few months, those who are more academically able recognize, and strive to write comments on higher cognitive levels. When their entries touch, however minutely, on analysis, synthesis, or evaluation, I praise them for the quality of their thinking. For example, Scott later in the course wrote about the westward expansion from an Indian point of view:

White men were coming in white covered wagons and everytime we investigate them, they'd shoot at us. I guess they basically aggressive. I wonder what's gonna happen to us in years to come.

He describes the clash between settler and Indian and evaluates (level 6) the settler as basically aggressive. (He then speculates on what impact this conflict will have on "us" in the future.) Discussion of his comment involves questions of aggression, both historical and personal.

Can you think of any other examples where people other than settlers showed a fair degree of basic aggression?

How would you feel if someone tried to drive you out of your home, neighborhood, or city?

If you were an Indian, and saw the settler come into your homeland, would you view your reactions as aggressive, or defensive?

In answer to the first question, I want to stimulate recall of a major war or armed conflict. Other questions evolve into considerations of how defensive activities become labeled as aggressive reactions. Who determines when this line has been crossed? How? Our discussions do not always result in satisfactory answers. My intent, however, is not to seek only "correct" answers, but to arrange a sequence of questions to stimulate responses from mere recall to more abstract possibilities or conditions.

This is an exciting and creative challenge because I never know exactly what students will write for their thinkbook entry and thus questions and possibilities evolve (or don't evolve) from the spontaneity of the reactive moment. For students who are not able to make a significant observation at the time, success is possible because nearly all writing efforts can be praised by referring to the use of good descriptive words, sensory details, powerful verbs, interesting or unusual observations. In this regard, Paul's focused writing evaluation of the most valuable basketball player "majic johnson" presents an interesting learner. This mildly mentally handicapped student that I took a chance on and included in the writing-to-learn group, bears down and writes, sorts out and evaluates data at the same time others in the class are writing, and is trying to fulfill the assignment just as his classmates are. Of course, he is not. We are writing about history, not basketball. In another sense, he is doing what everyone else is doing, except it is not on the subject, but it is "on" the mental processes I wish to encourage and develop. In sharing his writing, he gives evidence of interpreting facts and drawing inferences in much the same way others are. And since that is one of the expressed goals of the course, I must recognize and

praise the quality of his analysis. Ultimately, I place Paul in a history series more commensurate with his ability so he can pass the course. He is encouraged to continue to contribute to our discussions without doing the thinkbook entries. He lacks the mental flexibility to deal with all but a very narrow range of interests. Yet, if his P.E. teacher were using the writing-to-learn process instead of the traditional objective tests which Paul fails, his focused writing on sports, and excellent explanation of what he meant, could result in his not only passing the academic portion of that course, but excelling in it.

Consider another thinkbook use. When the class is asked to define "nationalism," John writes:

I'm totally confused. I think that Nationalism is one heck of a word. I don't know too much about it but what you said I think it is one important word . . . some of the comments are all of the past like Goeage Washington in the boat going across and Paul Reavr . . . but America is one of the best I think, but I wonder if we all people could stop fighting.

John writes "Mixed up" in the margin at the end of his last sentence, but here is an expression of honesty with some deeper implications and insights. If he is confused, it is a safe bet that others who did not find much to write on about this topic are confused too. I now have an opportunity to clear up this confusion before going on. But there is more.

What came out of the discussion of John's statement was not his or the others' inability to define nationalism. It was that last sentence about fighting where he admitted he was "mixed up." The colonial revolutionary wars against the British are quite rightly portrayed as events of heroic importance. Yet, against the current background of highly publicized confrontations all over the world—Vietnam, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Central America, Northern Ireland, and on and on—he finds it hard to view any armed conflict, however noble, in heroic terms. He has, at age seventeen, been burned out on the war issue, without having ever carried a gun, fired a shot, or spent one day in the military. I owe John much because his one small piece of honesty has helped me to understand something very significant about how some of our young people may react to the struggles and heroics of conventionally written history. Also, that acknowledgment increases my obligation to be more sensitive and aware of how young people view conflict in modern terms. All this from one thinkbook entry. Toby Fulwiler notes: "Journal writing works because every time students write, they individualize instruction. The act of silent writing, even for five minutes, generates ideas" (1980, 15). Yes, and some rather significant and unexpected insights too!

The Multiple Question/Statement Approach

The multiple question/statement assignment previously listed usually contains from four to six statements placed on the front chalkboard (or overhead) and are used at an appropriate time in the instructional hour. Originally I reasoned that if I provided a hierarchical range of questions, those able to function on higher cognitive levels would be drawn to questions on levels four, five, and six. Interestingly, it was not the cognitive levels that always attracted them, but what seemed important at the moment. For example, Sarah, like Scott, took the same higher cognitive level question—writing about the westward expansion from an Indian viewpoint—and loudly concluded that the Indian-settler conflict was “Just like the blacks being pushed around by the whites.” Students of both races expressed equally strong rebuttals. Were her comments an example of an inappropriate thinkbook activity? Not necessarily. Tristine Rainer, in describing basic diary or thinkbook entries, notes there are four natural modes of expression: catharsis, description, free-intuitive writing, and self-expression (1978, 72–114). Sarah’s reaction thus becomes an appropriate catharsis/self-expression commentary of her perceptions on this historical event and demonstrates another opportunity for a unique insight into student thinking by using thinkbook journals. However, getting this system going at the beginning of the year, as Bobby’s writing sample indicated, presented only one of many problems.

Grading Thinkbook Entries

My initial inclination was not to grade these deceptively “simple” entries. However, after only the second thinkbook assignment, Mike said, “Hey Mr. Marik, what kinda grade we gonna get for this writing?” I had previously explained how many people such as Lewis and Clark, scientists, and prominent individuals throughout history had used journals for their own purposes and rewards. I also stressed how writing helps to clarify existing thoughts and generate new ideas, insights, and understandings of a topic. I marshaled all the arguments I could think of to convey my deep conviction about the worth of writing for its own sake, but in the end they nailed me to the wall with pointed statements to the effect that if they were not going to get a grade for this writing, then there was no reason to do it. I recognized the somewhat crass but eminently practical merit of the argument and reluctantly agreed to grade all entries so their writing time would not be “wasted.” But how to grade every assignment?

I resolved not to get into the trap of assigning more writing and then losing energy and interest as the year wore on because of the paper load. The system I finally used permits students to get maximum credit for quality work, without increasing the paper load because these entries are not routinely collected. Here is how it works. I enter credit for work at the time of discussion by a zero (0), check (✓) or plus (+) system. Students received zero for refusing to write anything, a check for writing an entry but refusing to share it, and a plus for writing an entry, reading it to the class (and discussing it, whenever questions arise). Later, when I'm pressed, the 0, ✓, or + can be converted to an E, C, or A grade. Very few students get many zeroes because most like to be asked their opinion. They write often, express their feelings and reactions, and get immediate comments and reinforcement at the instructional moment when it is most relevant.

In general, thinkbook entries take five to ten minutes to write, approximately the same time to share, and are used two or three times a week. They are used along with regular textbook work so that the interactive, perceptive nature of these entries are tightly bound in the student's mind to the expectations of the course. This bonding can be accomplished in half a semester. The thinkbook entry format is not used the second semester with these same students. By this time, the spontaneous response to reading and situations has become instead somewhat automatic, and we thus concentrate more on blending these unique impressions into stages of the composing process. The result is short pieces of writing or a longer expository essay.

The Longer Essay

Unit one is a study of the structures that our first Americans built. I directed students' attention to a colorful page on which were displayed nine major sections of the country where Indian cultures developed distinct habitats. For example, the Eastern Woodland houses were made from wood, sticks, bark, and skins; the Northwest coast structures were primarily of cedar; the Southwest primarily of stone and mud. Students concentrated on these three concrete examples in preparation for their first essay assignment and started the prewriting stage by naming parts of the structure as I **listed** on the board the similarities and differences between parts of a modern house (their house), and what they can observe from the picture of Indian structures. Toward the end of the period, students made a copy of this list as part of their "research," because the board was to be erased. Here is a sample list.

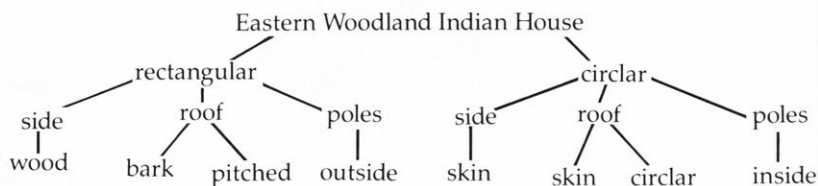
Modern House	Indian House
side	side
front	front
back	back
wall	wall
gutter	no gutter
air ducts	no
windows	no
locks	no
floor	floor
ceiling	ceiling
insulation	no
attic	no
basement	no
brick	stone
closet	no
bathroom	woods
wires	no
bathtub	no
plumbing	no
hot water	no

The next day we focused on the two Eastern structures, noticing that one is a rectangular, wood and bark, Quonset-shaped hut, and the other is a circular, skin covered, igloo-shaped design. I brought in small pieces of tree bark, and as it was handled, weighed, inspected, and discussed, we **clustered** the relevant qualities opposite the word "bark" (see following). Once this visual, tactile, auditory, interactive process is experienced and learned, the class **brainstormed** the qualities of materials not brought in, such as sap, poles, skin, and materials common to the other two cultures (structures) we were studying.

Naming word	Giving qualities to naming words	Giving actions to naming words
bark	covering, wood, chip, strip, light, brown, red, rough, from a tree, smell (stink), pine, thin, brittle, float, soft, waterproof, can be tied together	burning, grows, broken, bent, protect

skin	soft, furry, warm, brown, waterproof, tough, shrink, painted, stretched, sewed	make clothing, warmed, tied, sewed, cute
pole	wood, strong, thin, long, tied, straight	burn
sap	sticky, honey, thick, glue, syrup, brush on, smeared, smooth, shiny, pitch	dry

We had now generated a wealth of detailed information on the three main Indian structures. However, care must be taken not to get the information mixed up in the process of transferring it into essay form. The data needs to be organized. To do this, students tree their information. Maimon notes that treeing helps students see different kinds of relationships and can be especially valuable for the visually orientated person (1981, 25). Treeing is thus more than a fancy or unusual way to outline because it taps the right-brain functions, from which associations can be more readily seen. Cynthia's sample shows her work in comparing the two eastern structures.



Once the treeing was finished, I modeled sentences orally using data from students' clusters and topic trees. After class discussion, students entered the drafting stage by writing their own sentences. Unfortunately, few students used many of the descriptive words we had collected. Most of the vocabulary was quite elementary. It did not seem very productive to expend energy generating words in the prewriting stage when students used only 20 or 30 percent of those words in the actual composition. However, John Freund notes in a *College English* article entitled "Entropy and Composition" that the brain may induce entropy or make energy (words) unavailable for use according to the second law of thermodynamics the same way that an internal combustion engine is only about 30 percent efficient. The prewriting or word-generating energy has to be necessarily wasteful in order to produce enough random word energy to move words onto paper where they are again selectively considered in the drafting and revising stage. Freund says:

It should be clear at this point that communication and composition are no more exempt from the constraints of the second law of

thermodynamics than are countless other life processes. On the contrary, it would be unreasonable to assume that composition achieves the higher levels of organization it seeks without paying for them in some fashion. (1980, 499)

My alarm about special education students not using all their generated words or energy seems unfounded because their written efforts parallel processes essential and unavoidable in all writing. They are creating and producing as they should be, commensurate with nonspecial education students.

Revision in this assignment is limited to two main activities: (1) drafting introductions and conclusions and (2) checking paragraph accuracy and unity. The introductory paragraph is constructed using a "funnel" design which begins with a generalized statement and narrows down to one last sentence which is the essay's thesis. I help students draft this paragraph because they have not been taught this model. Further, at this point in the composition process we can proceed from prewriting to a drafting activity, using what has been discovered about the topic. The students are now in a better position to understand what it is we are to introduce, emphasize, and conclude. Revision for accuracy and unity means double checking the draft to determine that only the basic information clustered and treed in each category has been accurately entered in the correct paragraphs. Cynthia's essay demonstrates:

Early Indian Dwellings

There are many types of Indian dwellings. The Eastern woodland was made of wood and skin. The wood dwelling was a rectangular shape. The skin was circular. The Northwest Coast was made of wood too and it is shape rectangular our houses today. The Southwest Pueblo was made of mud and staw. Its shape was square. They are all different in unusual ways. For example, Northwest Coast has nice totems with different shapes and colors. The of the most unusual are Eastern woodland, Northwest Coast, Northwest Pueblo.

The Eastern woodlands had rectangular house and circular. The rectangle used mostly wood. It has a door and two windows and bark is used for the roof and other things. The rectangular house is bigger then the circular house. The circular house has skin that is used and poles are used to help hold it up. There is a circular door and none windows. But it is painted with many shapes and colors. Sap is used to help the skin stick together.

The Northwest Coast have nice totem poles. The poles they got from cedar trees. They can be painted on with blue, green, brown eyes. Cedar is ued for other things like building a house. It is hard, it smells good it has rings on it to see how old it is. It lasts a longer time than other then other Indian more than anything else. The

house of the Northwest Coast they usually have totem poles in front of the home. They have pitch roofs and use sap to help hold it together and the side together. They have circular doors.

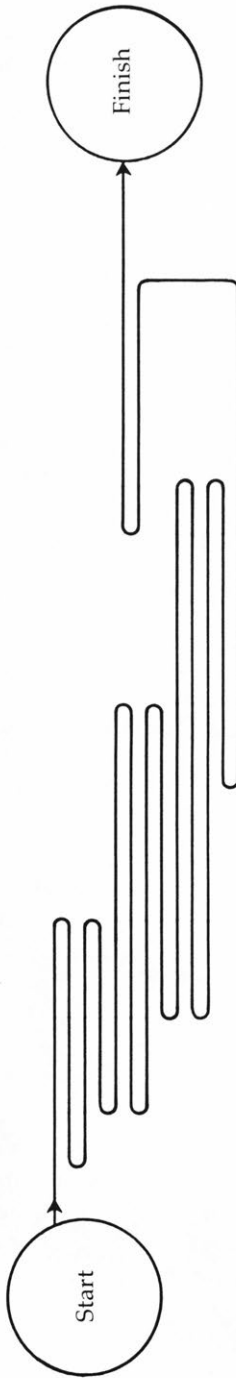
The Southwest Indians home are very different than the Eastern and Northwest. To start with they use mud and stone, clay and starw, insaed of wood and skin. When it is windy and sunny they go inside because it cool. When the build they use ladders and stairs to work there way up. Their house one square and tall. They have many window and doors with many rooms. After they get done with building, making sure they square and straight, they let it dry. After it dries, it is very strong and it last a long time. And when you look up it you can see that its many stories high.

Editing seems to thread its persistent way through all stages from the student's first thoughts to the final draft. This is true even for think-book entries. My reminders not to worry about spelling and punctuation early in the composing process are routinely ignored, a situation both frustrating and encouraging: frustrating because I believe the free flow of perceptions should continue unimpeded without starting and stopping midthought to spell "settlers" or "military," encouraging because of the students' desire to spell all words correctly. Interestingly, students new to my class (but old to our school system) never ask any questions about the relative quality of ideas, paragraph structure, topic sentences, introductory patterns, conclusions, or many other considerations relating to audience, tone, or style. Perhaps they saw their previous writing efforts floundering time and again in a morass of mechanical errors and thus perceived the absence of these errors as the sole measure of "good" writing.

Ultimately, I have to tell myself how much editing is enough. I do not want my students to feel their composing efforts will always end up hacked to pieces by this teacher. Hence, obvious mechanical imperfections are not relentlessly expunged. As long as the essays show evidence of learning, of reacting to, thinking about, and organizing data, they are acceptable.

To help students understand writing as a process or sequence of steps, I made a transparency (see figure 1) to convey the general ideas, but I explain that there is considerable overlapping and shifting back and forth between these categories. I display this transparency whenever necessary to help students see where we are in the composing process. We routinely start new assignments with prewriting activities which eventually touch all stages on the way to completion. "Eventually" is an important word because my students have a tendency to dash off a few sentences and turn it in as an "essay" without going through the process. I want my students to understand, as Randall Freisinger notes:

Composing Developmental Process

**Prewriting**

Free writing
 Note taking
 Scribbling
 Dreaming
 Talking
 Listening
 Research
 Journals
 Impressions

Drafting

Organizing
 Introduction
 Thesis
 Paragraphs
 Facts
 Examples
 Conclusion

Revising

Accuracy
 Brevity
 Clarity
 Audience
 Tone
 Style
 Sentence struct.
 Paragraph struct.

Editing

Mechanics
 Spelling
 Punctuation
 Grammar

Publishing

Send to
 Teacher
 Magazine
 Journal
 Newspaper
 Customer

Figure 1. The Composing Developmental Process.

Almost all serious writing tasks, excepting mere copying, normally require a process, no matter how implicit and telescoped that process might be. For mature writers working on a single writing task, the process may be mostly unconscious and compressed. But if the writer's task is complex or if he or she lacks the confidence and fluency of a mature writer, the process becomes more explicit and protracted (1980, 161).

Essays similar to Cynthia's mark the conclusion of our first major unit. This effort takes about three weeks during the "September madness" of getting classes started. However, it is a productive time. Students learn some elements of expository writing and become accustomed to sharing thinkbook writings. Even students such as Bobby come around. He is still angry, noisy, and abusive, but as the trust level in the class rises, he is slowly coming to realize that we would really like to hear his comments and observations about the aspect of history we are studying.

The Touchstone Concept

However, not all of our written work can take as much time as the First American unit if we are to deal with over two hundred years of U.S. history in one school year. I resolved this problem with the "touchstone" concept. This approach provides a sequence that allows time for students to interact with selected events without losing a sense of historical momentum.

Using writing to learn means making rather arbitrary decisions to skip sections of American history because the writing process is more time-consuming than a more conventional approach of moving through an entire text, page by page, in one year. The basic idea is to select key events relating to times of major historical importance.

Historians are compelled to be selective, partly because details on all aspects of life hundreds or thousands of years ago may not be available. They are also selective because not all events are factors in the thesis a historian is pursuing. As a result, most textbook versions of history are arranged to follow a chosen format, with contributing causes and events neatly bundled into sequential chapters. Further, as new evidence surfaces, analysis changes, and history is rewritten to clarify our elusive heritage. Thus, at best we read and teach selective history, and the touchstone concept is an extension of this selective gathering of events. The purpose is to enable the special education student to react to and identify with an event directly and personally. Students briefly pause here, touch an event, then proceed to the next touchstone on

their way to a major topic or theme which can be explored in greater detail.

In order to maintain a sense of continuity between selected historical events, my curriculum contains major and minor historical events. The touchstone concept provides a more intensive look at certain events to permit the special education student time to absorb, write, and react to the material. The following are two examples of touchstone assignments.

Narrative Writing

Write a story recalling the most memorable smells, sights, and sounds in the "Battle of the Wilderness" between the combined forces of the French and Indians, against the British. The PENTAD may be helpful. You may start *anywhere* on the PENTAD for your story. Refer to the picture on p. 48.

1. *SCENE*—What was it like that morning in the woods before the battle began? Describe a beautiful fall day in the early morning woods. What do you see, smell and hear? Be specific i.e. A squirrel (not animal) scampered across our path.
2. *ACTORS-AGENTS*—What do the French smell like? What do the Indians smell like? What did they eat for breakfast? What do you think the British smelled like?
3. *PURPOSE*—Why are you all in the woods this morning?
4. *MEANS*—(The way) What means have you chosen to solve the problem? What is the problem?
5. *ACTION*—How does the battle begin? What smells, sights, and sounds were noticed as the British forces approached? What noises did they make? What smells can you describe during the battle? What sounds did people make? What did they say?

END—Anything else? Who won? What significance (So what?) Did you notice any ironies or contrasts in your story?

Further suggestions for getting started.

Brainstorm a list of impressions about the woods in the fall. Do the same with the pentad categories. You may wish to use this guide.

Naming word	Giving qualities to naming words	Giving actions to naming words
-------------	----------------------------------	--------------------------------

Trees
(Better)

Leaves
(The more specific the better)

This lesson is on the French and Indian war. The link with previous composition skills learned is near the end of the assignment. It is a reminder to utilize previously learned skills such as when we wrote descriptions of bark, skin, poles, and sap in unit one. Here a similar process leads to clustering and brainstorming descriptions from a picture in the textbook, and using categories like Kenneth Burke's pentad as the primary essay form. Craig's sample shows how it is done:

Indians	mohawks, feathers, racoon hats, barefeet, canten, haff reed, metal arm bark, leather boots, gin, dark skin, maccians, blackhair, buffalo, head bands, pauches, knives, pistols, deerskin clothes
Scene	mss, rocks, grass, tree, shrubs, branches, ambush, leaves, smoke, haze from guns, Indians, British, French, covered wagons, horse, blood, red, people bleeding, Ohio Valley, time of year (fall), bark
Action	fighting-shooting guns, horse back riding, yelling, running, hiding behind tree, bushes, dieing, wounded, booming, falling people and cussing, horses sweating, smell gunpowder smoke
Purpose	French and Indian war started because the British wanted to be the power of the New World but the French and Indians were there also. The British wanted land, and the French had and the French didn't want to give it up.
Means	To solve this problem the British were going to fight the French and Indians for the Ohio Valley the problem to who is going to have power of the land.

Note that the left-hand margins list the five pentad categories. Opposite each category he has clustered his descriptions. From these words he will arrange sentences in much the same manner as in unit one, work these into paragraphs, and then into essay form. His essay was one of the best in the class. The pentad permits students to start with any question and then develop any other categories they choose.

Craig begins with explaining why the war was started and its purpose.

The French and Indian War started because the British wanted to be the main power of the New World, but the French and Indians were there also. The British wanted land the French had and they didn't want to give it up.

To solve this problem the British were going to fight the French for the Ohio valley and a lot of other land.

In 1754, it was a fall morning in the Ohio valley and he French were planning their attack on the British

Cynthia begins with setting or scene.

The morning was a little on the cold side. It was wet from the dew. The leaves were full of color like reds, yellow, browns. The trees were almost naked The smell was of trees and smoke from our campfire. The fire was crackly from the wet wood that was drying too fast.

The French and Indians smelled of sweat. They all needed a bath. The campfire was just hot enough to fix eggs and good old oatmeal A rider came by and told them that the British were coming. Plates, cups, forks, spoons, went flying up in the air.

Then the French and the Indians surrounded the British. There were horses going around, there were guns shooting, there were stabbing of knives

Bobby has by now found much to say and begins with action.

The Indians and the French came down into the valley for fight the British in the year 1755. Then all hell broke loose when all of a sudden there was a lot of killing and suffering from both sides all guns were going off there was a lot of loud racket and smoke coming out from the end of growing from the people just before they died.

Role-playing

In another example of a touchstone assignment the students **role-play** by assuming the identity of a reporter for the fictitious *Boston Times* newspaper during the Boston Massacre. Marie's graphic, descriptive involvement with the topic leads one to believe she will not easily forget this historical event.

Five Innocent People Get Killed!

It was March 24, 1770 the early evening about 6:15 p.m. When a special British Military force from Canada was sent to the Boston area. Soldier's and colonists soon were involv in quarrels. A force of soldier fired on crowded of people. There was five people killed out the crowded. Five people killed was badly wound. Some got shot in the head, neck and chest. One man got shot in the head. Five innocent people that killed among the crowd there was one who was a runaway slave Crispus Attucks, who had been in anti-British working along the water front. Sam Gray was shot on the left side of the head. Pat Carl was shot three time, once in the chest in the right leg and in the eye. It was two more people who killed. James Caldwell who owned A little store in Boston. When he heard the gun went off he ran out of the store with his gun started shooting shead and they shot him down and his best friend Gay Maverick.

What started this big quarrel was over the Sugar act 1764. . . .

Marie summarizes some of the less graphic frustrations of the colonists, such as the Townshend and other precedent acts. From this brief

sample, it is not easy to appreciate the relatively enormous amount of energy she expended in research, creativity, organizing data, and the tremendous satisfaction she received when her classmates complimented her on the story. Her success is worthy of note if only because her initial thinkbook entry indicated an ambivalence toward this subject:

I think history is important to learn and I think everybody should now something about history. I don't like history to much But I wont to now something about the united states of america.

One advantage of the touchstone concept is that the progression of events and causes leading up to major events may be more clearly understood by focusing intensively on specific representative happenings rather than trying to deal with the multiple causes and contradictions traditionally surrounding historical analysis and synthesis. Assignments in regular classes at this level are very complex and "overload" students with learning, cognitive, and conceptual disabilities. Thus, a curriculum that touches on smaller selected issues recognizes these students' learning difficulties and helps them understand some of the causes of the Revolutionary War.

Conclusions

The main advantage of writing as a way of learning is the active participation it generates from all students, and the opportunity it provides for them to embrace assignments in intensely personal ways. It encourages a stretching of intellectual and conceptual thinking and insights on an emotional involvement in learning. Students cannot sit through entire semesters with minimal engagement in the academic processes as some have routinely done for years. Indeed, they do not want to, because the excitement of ideas expressed through their writing keeps them interested.

From my experience, there are a few cautions to consider when using the writing-to-learn approach with special education students. First, decide well in advance on limiting the kinds of writing assignments. There are so many different ways to come into a piece of writing that confusion can easily result. My students did not show an easy flexibility in adapting to new genres and techniques, and for this reason the frustration level was at times unusually high. Ian Pringle, in an article entitled "Why Teach Style: A Review Essay," notes: "One of the marked correlates of intellectual development in student writers is growth in ability to move up and down the ladder of abstractions, and

particularly the ability to move further up and down it within one paper" (*College Composition and Communication*, 1983, 96). To increase the chances for success, repeat a few selected approaches many times rather than introduce many new ones throughout the course.

Second, repeat selected methods of putting a piece together. For example, I used the listing, clustering, and sentencings of the "First Americans" expository writing activity in the French and Indian War narrative assignment, and again much later in the Civil War writing assignment. Stick with one method until it becomes as well learned and automatic as possible.

L.N. Landa, in the book *Instructional Regulation and Control, Cybernetics, Algorithmization and Heuristics in Education*, states: "In order to reach some major instructional objectives more effectively and efficiently, it is advisable to teach cognitive operations and processes (algorithmic or heuristic) purposefully and explicitly" (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Educational Technology Publications, 1976, 134). He suggests processes be learned so well that they become part of an automatic system of response to be used whenever solving problems of a repetitive nature.

Finally, we ask the inevitable question: What has been learned by using the writing-to-learn approach that could not have been learned with a more traditional presentation of history? Of course, students learned to write sentences, paragraphs, funnel introductions, theses, revisions, and conclusions, and they learned techniques of naming, listing, clustering, brainstorming, along with the pentad, role-playing and many other genres not described in this chapter. These techniques and forms, however, are not the truly important learning. They are just the framing that bordered the display of personal discoveries. The truly important learning came when students began to understand how the writing-to-learn process helped their thinking processes. They did not know how to generate first thoughts, how to lead these initial impressions to higher levels of abstraction, or how to work them into a piece that expressed what they really wanted to say and feel about a topic. Perhaps most important, this method opened a way for them to come into a subject and make it live through unique, personal reactions to flat pages of old facts and faded pictures.

In a larger sense, there is something strikingly appropriate about using the writing-to-learn method in history. It has to do with the activity of gathering, interpreting, mulling over, and making personal sense out of those democratic processes we wish for our students as responsible adult citizens. The tangible evidences of this activity, their written descriptions, are not flawless. But these students discovered the essence of many historical moments and were left with deep impressions

that are likely to remain long after detailed facts are forgotten. In the end, even Bobby became drawn into this process and could not go on maintaining, "I got nothing to say." He had found much to say. And, much to my relief, it was about history, not about his desire to see X-rated movies in my classroom.